THE MIRRORWORK OF TIBETAN RELIGIOUS HISTORIANS: A COMPARISON OF BUDDHIST AND BON HISTORIOGRAPHY

by

Zeff Bjerken

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Doctoral Committee:

Professor Donald S. Lopez, Jr., Chair
Professor Madhav Deshpande
Professor Luis O. Gómez
Associate Professor Robert Sharf

UMI Number: 3000921

Bell & Howell Information and Learning Company
300 North Zeeb Road
P.O. Box 1346
Ann Arbor, MI 48106-1346

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lineage of critical scholarship on religion, my reading of Bon histories has been profoundly influenced by these scholars' instruction and commentary. While I do not pretend to understand their tradition and its meaning as they would, I do believe that Bon challenges the Tibetologist and Buddhologist to reconsider how we understand Tibetan history and Buddhism, and that our knowledge must develop in sustained dialogue with Bon (and Buddhist) tradition.

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INTRODUCTION

The research embodied in this work was undertaken with the objective of comparing the two religions of historical importance in Tibet, namely Buddhism (*chos*) and Bon (*bon*), and identifying their differential quality. The relationship between Buddhism and Bon is particularly puzzling because of their close proximity in terms of similar doctrines, rituals, meditation practices, iconography, and soteriological goals; and yet the adherents of both traditions often manifest a need to establish distance from those belonging to the "other religion" (*gzhan sde*). There is considerable overlap in their doctrinal theory and praxis, so much so that they often seem nearly indistinguishable to the unaligned western scholar. The followers of Buddhism and Bon (*bonpo*) share a common worldview that life in cyclic existence (*saṃsāra*) is characterized by suffering, it is governed by the law of moral causality (*las*, Skt. *karma*) that propels the individual's consciousness to take rebirth in one of the six states of existence, and they share the aspiration to reach enlightenment and Buddhahood. Bonpos and Buddhists follow the same path of accumulating religious merit and wisdom in order to attain Buddhahood, and they rely on similar techniques of meditation for achieving this goal. Not only is the doctrinal and ritual content of Buddhist and Bon literature remarkably similar, it is classified according to similar canonical categories (*Bka' 'gyur* and *Bstan/Brten 'gyur*), with distinctions between Sūtra (*Mdo*), Vinaya (*'Dul ba*), Abhidharma (*Mngon pa*), and Tantra (*Gsang sngags rgyud*). In terms of popular religious practices too there is little to distinguish between the Buddhist and Bonpo. All Tibetans chant sacred mantras and inscribe them on stones, they go on pilgrimages to sacred sites and circumambulate them, and they make offerings to deities that are classified according to the same categories.

However, as soon as one begins to examine the doctrines and rituals of Buddhists and Bonpos more carefully, subtle distinctions begin to emerge. Some of the differences mentioned frequently by Tibetan participants and western observers include the fact that Buddhists circumambulate sacred places like monasteries, stūpas, and mountains in a clockwise direction, while the Bonpos usually circumambulate counter-clockwise;[1] and the mantra most frequently recited by the Buddhist pilgrim while circumambulating is "Oṃ maṇi padme hūṃ," while the Bonpo chants "Oṃ matri muye sale du." Likewise, the deities invoked and represented in iconography may at first sight seem identical in appearance, but closer inspection reveals that their names, their characteristic colors, ritual objects, and most significantly, their mythological origins are quite different.[2] Such differences in iconographic detail and ritual orientation may seem superficial in light of the overwhelming parallels between Buddhist and Bon doctrine. The questions that arise for the comparativist are: Where are the differences between Buddhism and Bon most evident? How might the comparativist best characterize their complex relationship? How might the differential quality that distinguishes them be identified?

This dissertation locates the most significant difference between Buddhism and Bon not in the minutiae of their doctrinal theory, or in the details of their ritual practices, but in their different sources of religious authority and their competing versions of sacred history. Both Buddhist and Bon apologists composed historical narratives about the origin of their religion and its transmission to Tibet. It is this genre of literature, designated by Buddhists as *chos 'byung* ("the origins of Buddhism") and by Bonpos as *bon bstan 'byung* ("the origins of the Bon teachings"), that is analyzed in Chapter One. The purpose of this analysis is to offer is a nuanced reading of Buddhist and Bon historical narratives as a literary genre, drawing upon the methods and insights of Hayden White on narrative and Jonathan Z. Smith on comparison. The approach adopted here is explicitly "non-orthodox," meaning that my readings shuttle back and forth between Buddhist and Bon historical narratives as a dynamic ensemble, treating them

performatively as dramatic representations. This reading technique avoids the fixed perspective that results when one adopts the position of one "tradition" to view the "other." All too frequently western interpreters have aligned themselves with the Buddhist perspective, and the Bonpos have been subjected to the "objective" gaze of their opponents. The technique of reading pursued here aspires towards reflexivity, by making apparent the ambivalent mirroring relationship between Buddhist and Bon subjects and the stylized symmetries created by Tibetan historians.

Buddhist and Bon historical texts present varying representations of Tibet's early history, from the first kings until the disintegration of the Yarlung empire (842). When identifying and describing the key religious events in the early history of Tibet, Buddhist and Bonpo historians interpret these events from perspectives that are radically different, often even antagonistic. Their polemically charged evaluation of the past demonstrates a need to establish their own religious tradition's legitimate status as orthodox "insiders" (*nang ba*), in contradistinction to their opponents, who are dismissed as heterodox "outsiders" (*phyi ba*). What emerges from these historical feuds is a contest over the origins, purity, and the positive cultural force of their respective religions in "historicizing" Tibetan territory. For example, where Buddhist writers present the missionary heroes of Indian Buddhism (such as Śāntarakṣita and Padmasambhava) as the first civilizers of Tibet in the seventh century, Bon writers respond by listing their own heroes, their great texts, and the harmonious blend of Bon and politics (*bon srid zung 'brel*) that flourished during Tibet's ancient historical period, long before the arrival of Buddhism. Bon historiography develops in response to the dominant representations of the past created by the Buddhists as a form of conscious resistance and empowerment. Not surprisingly, how Bonpos remembered their past had much to do with how they were "remembered" and imaged by their opponents. Their resistance involved the appropriation of the images and ideology from their more powerful opponents.

Despite the partisanship and the polemical purpose of their work, Tibetan writers often style their own histories as "clear mirrors" (*gsal ba'i me long*) that faithfully reflect past events. To the detached western observer, what are striking about the historical accounts of both Bonpos and Buddhists are their symmetries in style and form: they are near mirror images of each other. Our purpose in the first chapter is to look behind the mirroring histories so that we may determine what literary frames support them. How do the representations of the past acquire their mimetic effect for Tibetan readers? What literary devices are used in these works to create an aura of authenticity? In pursuing answers to these questions, we will embark on a literary history of Buddhism and Bon that takes us through a corridor of mirrors. The vista gained after traversing through the corridor will not grant us any accurate vision of Tibet's imperial past, but we will see how the Buddhist and Bon "traditions" came into formation from this literature.

The purpose of the first chapter is not to reconstruct the *real* history of religion during ancient Tibet. Rather, our interest lies in understanding how competing Buddhist and Bon historical narratives each lay claim to Tibet as the land of destiny for their religion. The writers legitimize their own religious lineage and delegimitize that of their opponents. Not all of the historical literature in Tibet, however, was written by religious writers with an apologetic and moral purpose. Following Hayden White's analysis of western genres of historiography, we will see that Tibetan history writing can be classified into three distinct genres—the annals, the chronicle, and the narrative—each of which manifests distinctive modes of historical consciousness and varying degrees of interest in religious topics. The first two genres, the annals and the chronicle, are found in the earliest Tibetan manuscripts recovered from Dunhuang. We will briefly review two exemplary historical texts, the *Annals* and the *Chronicle* of Dunhuang, as distinct types of historiography. Our review of these two works, which are neither religious in purpose nor narrative in form, will throw into relief the innovative features of the later Buddhist and Bon histories. Since the *Annals* and *Chronicle* are two of our earliest sources for learning

about the Yarlung period, reviewing their content will also enable us to appreciate how later religious historians created such a glorious vision of Tibet's Golden Age.

The distinctive feature of Buddhist and Bon historiography is that it is presented as a narrative, the purpose of which is to entertain and edify the faithful, and to establish the authenticity of the writer's own lineage and tradition. These narratives are stylized similarly, sharing tropes, categories, and techniques of emplotment that will be analyzed in some detail. While additional textual study would provide more "data" and perhaps a richer reading of these strategies, it would not change the basic structure and purpose of the narrative. The analysis of the complex positions assumed by Buddhists and Bonpo historians vis-à-vis the other religion presented in the first two chapters draws attention to two paradoxical moves. While both employ strategies that create difference and distance between each other, their polemical polarizing is offset by their mutual mimicry and assimilation. This double movement, discernible in the dramatic narratives of the religious rivals/partners, suggests both a fight and a dance. As a duel, the opponents struggle to push the other into the shadows, to earn the spotlight solo on the Tibetan stage for the glory of their own tradition. In these polemical duels, when Bonpos countered the Buddhist parry that would reduce them to being Tibet's silent other, their riposte was to produce their own Bon history, but it was a history articulated within the framework of the Buddhist model. Thus the duel often seems to turn into a duet, during which both partners alternate between leading and following, their rhetorical gestures imitating each other in rhyming movements. The historians' expression of dissent relies upon the same repertoire of forms that the others use. Thus difference slips into sameness, which causes some consternation to their opponents and considerable confusion for western interpreters too. Sometimes this *pas-de-deux* seems seductive, bringing the other closer into one's grasp and control, but at times the nearly mirrored movements appear ironic and parodic, with considerable degree of distortion.

How then are we to evaluate these performances? Many Tibetologists today favor viewing the Bon tradition as Buddhist, which collapses their differences and brings Bon safely into the fold of Buddhology. This "ecumenical" perspective downplays the importance of the polemical duels in favor of the *pas-de-deux*. As an alternative, the perspective favored here keeps the dialogical tension between both movements alive, and it underscores the tense position that Bon plays within the larger framework of our imagining Buddhism. From the point of view of a critical "outsider," this complex double movement produces an unintended effect, for it blurs the boundaries between the two traditions and erodes the line demarcating "insider" and "outsider." Rather than achieving two distinct monolithic identities, the dramatic encounters created by Buddhist and Bonpo writers produces symmetrical subjects whose identities are mutually implied or already hybrid. The cast of characters may change, the protagonists may differ, but the duel/duet itself remains.[3]

My purpose in the first chapter is to map out some of the shifting positions occupied by Tibetan historians, without pinpointing the precise coordinates that an in-depth historical or textual analysis would provide. Since this chapter focuses on the problems of genre, it is generic and programmatic in orientation. I will be satisfied if the reader gets a glimpse of how Tibetan Buddhists and Bon historians were formulating their identity and inventing their tradition vis-à-vis each other. The next step in reading their narratives could be towards investigating the network of historical conditions that produced the competing representations of the past. However, such a project lies outside the scope of this dissertation. Future research might focus on the grand narratives of Tibet's liberation that were composed during the twelfth to fourteenth century. Any serious effort at historicizing this adversarial relationship between Buddhists and Bonpos, and their mututal constitution of identity, would seek to locate these contests within various socio-political contexts. For instance, their polemical contests might be examined as an effect of the sectarian politics and the competition over institutional patronage that

began in the twelfth century and continued thereafter; or the representations of past contests between Buddhists and Bonpos might reflect the writers' missionary agenda at the Mongol court; likewise, the glorification of the "golden age" of the imperial past might be connected to Tibet's national revival under Byang chub rgyal mtshan; and the historian's need to establish the orthodoxy of his own tradition might reflect the preoccupation with canon formation during the fourteenth century. The purpose of this kind of contextualization would not be to reduce all Buddhist and Bon forms of self- and other-representation to social history or sectarian politics—this reductionism would merely substitute one form of totalizing history for the religious ones offered. Rather, the goal would be to see how the struggles between Buddhism and Bon, which are projected back into the imperial period, actually emerge from the writers' contemporary experience.

One of the biggest challenges facing the comparativist is how to render intelligible the hybrid phenomena of Buddhism/Bon in Tibet and evaluate their complex relationship. In Chapter Two we will turn to how European scholars have interpreted and evaluated the historical relationship of Bon to Buddhism. We will see that western scholarship often continues and even extends the Tibetan polemical biases found in the texts already reviewed. There is a significant degree of intercultural mimesis that emerges when reading Orientalist representations of Tibetan religions in light of Tibetan polemical deformations of the religious "other." Two strategies can be detected in the work of both western scholars and Tibetan writers: either Bon is marginalized as "other" (as the religion of "outsiders"), or Bon is assimilated into Buddhism as a heterodox branch and deemed derivative (and thus located as a marginal "insider"). The designation of Bon as a marginal or derivative tradition in western scholarship certainly echoes Buddhist polemicists, but this is exacerbated when the category "Shamanism" is used to describe Bon. The second chapter offers a critical genealogy of the shifting category of

"shamanism" in western popular and scholarly discourse on Bon, for it has proved to be the most widely used and enduring label for the identification of Bon.

The "middle way" approach adopted in the second chapter will steer clear of the Scylla of scholarly marginalization (e.g. when Bon is labeled a form of primitive "shamanism") and the all-consuming Charbydis of assimilation (e.g. when Bon is accepted as an unorthodox form of the "world religion" of Buddhism). An alternative model for interpreting the hybrid relationship of Buddhism/Bon will be proposed that draws upon the work of Homi Bhabha on mimesis. These two religions will be identified as mutually constituted and mimicking traditions, rather than as authentic (Buddhism) and derivative (Bon), as they are commonly portrayed. In particular, the Bonpos' resistance through mimicry of the Buddhists will be explored. What we see, in brief, is a mirroring move that calls into question the selfsame presence of the Buddhist "original." Bon mimicry is menacing and subversive to Buddhists because it undermines their authority and posits the purity and priority of the "founder" Gshen rab's teachings. Against this assertion of having tamed and healed Tibet first, creating a kind of Bon *pax Tibetica*, Buddhist critics respond by categorizing the earliest teachings as the Bon that "erupts" or "breaks out" (*brdol Bon*), akin to a sickness that scarred Tibet (*pox Tibetica*), not sacred at all. The irony here is that the energy each devotes to identifying the other as a threatening "outsider" tends to reify them into much more than they ever were, creating an opponent of monolithic stature.

The decision to focus on Tibetan historical texts that present competing views of the golden age of the imperial past is influenced too by the contemporary plight of Tibetan nationalists, who are trying to resist Chinese colonialism. These modern nationalists, much like the Buddhist and Bon historians whose work has been analyzed, also look back nostalgically to the Tibetan imperial period, when China feared Tibet's powerful armies and its dominant political presence in Central Asia. While the foundational myths that connect Tibet's unique culture to Buddhism play an important

role for modern Buddhist nationalists, the Bon counter-narratives are also gaining more attention among a few elites in exile. The very recent growth of interest in the Bon tradition (among both Tibetans and westerners) is connected to this nationalist movement, for some of the leading Bon scholars (including Namkhai Norbu and Samten Karmay) value this alternative tradition as a repository of native Tibetan values.

In Chapter Three we will identify some of the general contours of this modern form of Bon nativist historiography, and assess the reactions to (and appropriation of) this nativist quest by western Tibetologists. The quest to recover Tibet's indigenous Bon roots, which motivates the modern historiography of Gendun Chophel, Samten Karmay, and Namkhai Norbu, share a number of important features. Their work demonstrates a shared interest in recuperating Tibet's origins as a great civilization, whether it be the glorious martial achievements of the Yarlung empire or the role of the indigenous Bon religion in supporting the ancient imperial lines in Tibet and Zhang zhung. For these nativists bent on uncovering the origins of what is "really" Tibetan, the investigation of ancient Tibet, Zhang zhung, and Bon is an intellectual expression of their patriotism. What proves so controversial about their work, however, is that they offer a critical assessment of Buddhist historiography. Traditional Buddhist historians are criticized especially for their tendency to dismiss Tibet's indigenous culture as backward, uncivilized, and inferior overall to Indian culture. In particular, the strong Indocentric bias found in Buddhist histories is deemed an obstacle for recognizing the positive, enduring traits of Tibetan culture. These historians turn to alternative sources for reconstructing Tibet's past, such as Dunhuang texts, ancient inscriptions, and even non-Tibetan historical sources. But in particular they rely on Bon texts, with varying degrees of critical distance.

The ongoing construction of identity and the invention of an enduring indigenous tradition are not simply intellectual exercises, but a complex historical and political process that takes place as an urgent social contest. For our nativist historians, both

Buddhism and the Chinese colonizer threaten to swallow up their Tibetan identity, so they are deemed the foreign "other" in order to find a genuine selfhood grounded in native soil. The project of the modern Tibetan nativists really reverses the traditional Buddhist evaluation of Bon from the derivative other into an authentic self; but Bon can only be constituted in relation to that Buddhist other. Bon can never achieve the autonomy that is claimed for it, for it is too dependent upon Buddhism for its identity.

My interest in mimicry, mirroring, and intercultural mimesis provides an opportunity for me to reflect on my own position in relation to the Tibetan historians as well as to my western predecessors. Since the focus of this dissertation has been directed towards the mirror of Buddhist-Bon reflexivity and how to identify their complex relationship, in my fourth chapter I conclude by situating my own position both politically and intellectually in terms of the disciplinary fields from which and for which this work is written.

Where do I stand in relation to the Buddhist/Bon mirrors of reflexivity? What motivates my reading of their historical narratives? In my selection of polemical religious histories, I have been motivated by a number of factors. I am drawn to the polemical narratives because their agonistic struggles imply that something important is at stake, other than the religious truth claims made—they contain important ideological content. The contestation between Buddhists and Bonpos makes their encounter ripe for theory, as a means for negotiating their contradictory polemical statements. Contemporary theorists like Homi Bhabha and Jonathan Z. Smith are concerned with "making difference" and rendering intelligible the conflicts propelling colonialism, identity politics, and religious conflict, issues that loom so ominously in our contemporary times. In drawing upon their methods for reading western historiography or for comparing religious traditions, and applying them to Tibetan texts and traditions, my intention is to bring this pre-modern Tibetan relationship into dialogue with contemporary western theorists, and to encourage Tibetologists and Buddhologists to reflect on the relevance and applicability of such

theory. The method used here suggests an alternative direction for comparative studies of Tibetan religions, one that recognizes the hybridizing process of historical interaction as well as the politics of religious synthesis. Such an approach challenges the "clerical" orthodoxies of lamas (both Buddhist and Bonpo), of modern Tibetan nationalists and nativists, and of western scholars who are antagonistic to religious synthesis and who defend the purity and authenticity of Tibet's true religion. The historical method does violence to the transcendental and eternal claims advanced by both Buddhist and Bon writers with an authority that is equally transcendent and eternal.[4]

Re-thinking the relationship between Buddhism and Bon requires reconfiguring these "objects" within the discipline of Buddhist studies and Tibetology. This project arises from a felt need to trespass upon the narrow disciplinary boundaries of Buddhist studies, boundaries that are so carefully policed by the high priests of Buddhist orthodoxy as well as the western curators of the Buddha. Many who belong to this discipline too often assume the unified coherence of their subject, while "syncretic" traditions such as Bon are deemed derivative. Our goal here is to re-imagine Buddhism and Bon as a cultural construct, theirs and ours in the field of Buddhist studies. The conclusion reached by many scholars of Bon today, namely that Bon is an unorthodox form of Buddhism, is misplaced.[5] The incorporation of Bon into Buddhism (and Buddhist Studies) not only plays into Buddhist polemics, replicating their strategy of control and condescension; and it not only disregards the innovation and the energy that Bonpos have invested in maintaining a distinct identity. What is really lost by incorporating Bon into Buddhism is the menacing threat Bon poses to the discipline, mirroring the always-already-hybrid nature of Buddhism. If we take seriously a vision of Buddhism and Bon as mutually constitutive, then the object of the field needs to be defined differentially.

Bon *qua* Bon is important for Buddhist studies for challenging our understanding of what binds Buddhism and what its boundaries are. These are issues of comparison. To paraphrase Jonathan Z. Smith,[6] the interest in Bon cannot depend simply on geographic,

apologetic, or historical reasons. That is, the interest in Bon cannot be merely "because it's there" on the Tibetan religious landscape, like Mount Everest (or Chomolungma), or because it has played a role in the collective creation of Tibetan civilization, or because some Tibetans we encounter today happen to be Bonpos. Rather, it is because of the peculiar position of Bon within the framework of imagining Buddhism: close, yet distant; similar, yet strange; familiar, yet exotic. This tension between the familiar and the unfamiliar, between "insider" and "outsider," at the very heart of imagining Buddhism/ Bon, has enormous cognitive power. It invites comparison. By virtue of its tensive situation between the near and the far, Bon provides an important test case for central methodological issues such as definition and comparison, the invention of tradition, the formation of religious identity, and the creation of religious authority and legitimacy. Even more fundamental is the way in which these topics can illuminate the larger questions of imagination, self-consciousness, and choice crucial to the academic study of religion. This dissertation seeks to articulate such choices and to develop a self-conscious awareness of how Bon and Buddhism might be imagined in tandem.

Notes to Introduction

[1] Toni Huber and Samten Karmay have pointed out that the generalization that Buddhists pilgrims perform their circumambulations clockwise, while Bonpos do it counter-clockwise, is not always the case in actual practice. For example, at the popular "Bon" site Kong po Bon ri Buddhist pilgrims circumambulate clockwise, while at Mount Tsa ri on Dag pa Shel ri the Bonpo circumambulate clockwise. See Toni Huber, "Putting the *gnas* back into *gnas-skor*: Rethinking Tibetan Buddhist Pilgrimage Practice," *Tibet Journal* 19.2 (Summer, 1994), p. 31; also Samten Karmay, "A Pilgrimage to Konpo Bon-ri," in *Tibetan Studies: Proceedings of the 5th Seminar of the International Association for Tibetan Studies* vol. I, ed. by Sh. Ihara and Zuiho Yamaguchi (Narita: Naritasan Shinshoji, 1992), p. 531.

[2] In the Introduction to his *The Bon Religion of Tibet: The Iconography of a Living Tradition* (Boston: Shambhala, 1996), Per Kvaerne identifies these points of convergence and divergence between Buddhism and Bon, but the remainder of his excellent study of Bon is devoted to specifying the particular iconographic details that are unique to Bon.

[3] I am indebted to Bernard Faure for this clever dual/duel distinction, at once complementary and oppositional, which he discusses in his *Chan Insights and Oversights: An Epistemological Critique of the Chan Tradition*, (Princeton University Press, 1993), pp. 131-2. Faure quotes Roland Barthes' hypothesis that many narratives "set two adversaries in conflict over some stake; the subject is then truly double, not reducible further by substitution; indeed, this is even perhaps a common archaic form, as though narrative, after the fashion of certain languages, had also known of a *dual* of persons." From Barthes' essay "Introduction to the Structural Analysis of Narratives," in his *Selected Writings* (Glasgow: Fontana paperbacks, 1983) p. 279.

[4] Here I am influenced by Bruce Lincoln's first three of his thirteen theses on method for the history of religions, listed in his article "Theses on Method" in *Method & Theory in the Study of Religion* 8 (1996): 225-27. The first three Theses are the following:

> 1) The conjunction "of" that joins the two nouns in the disciplinary ethnonym "History of Religions" is not neutral filler. Rather, it announces a proprietary claim and a relation of encompassment: History is the method and Religion the object of study. 2) The relation between the two nouns is also tense, as becomes clear if one takes the trouble to specify their meaning. Religion, I submit, is that discourse whose defining characteristic is its desire to speak of things eternal and transcendent with an authority equally transcendent and eternal. History, in the sharpest possible contrast, is that discourse which speaks of things temporal and terrestrial in a human and fallible voice, while staking its claim to authority on rigorous critical practice. 3) History of religions is thus a discourse that resists and reverses the orientation of that discourse with which it concerns itself. To practice history of religions in a fashion

> consistent with the discipline's claim of title is to insist on discussing the temporal, contextual, situated, interested, human, and material dimensions of those discourses, practices, and institutions that characteristically represent themselves as eternal, transcendent, spiritual, and divine.

[5] The designation of Bon as an unorthodox form of Buddhism was advanced by David Snellgrove in *The Nine Ways of Bon: Excerpts from the* gZi brjid (London: Oxford University Press, 1967); also his *Indo-Tibetan Buddhism: Indian Buddhists and their Tibetan Successors* (Boston: Shambhala, 1987); also Per Kvaerne, "Aspects of the Origin of the Buddhist Tradition in Tibet," *Numen* 19.1 (1972), pp. 22-40. Most recently, the main conclusion of Dan Martin's unpublished dissertation on *The Emergence of Bon and the Tibetan Polemical Tradition* (Indiana University, 1991) betrays the author's concern to locate Bon "inside" the criteria of Buddhist orthodoxy, when he argues that "Bon is Buddhist" (p. 311ff). While Martin's conclusion may be directed in part at diffusing the effects of the long history of antagonism between Buddhists and Bonpos (even though contemporary members of either tradition may well wonder, "whose side is he on?"), his primary target remains Buddhologists, who have tended to neglect Bon or dismiss it as another form of syncretism.

[6] These concluding remarks have been borrowed and transformed (*bsgyur*) from Jonathan Z. Smith's introduction to *Imagining Religion: From Babylon to Jonestown* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), p. xii. Where Smith uses Judaism I have substituted Bon, just as the Bonpos themselves have substituted their own terminology for Buddhist ideas.

CHAPTER I

STYLIZED SYMMETRIES IN TIBETAN HISTORICAL NARRATIVES

Buddhist and Bonpo historians present competing and often contradictory representations of Tibet's early history. When identifying and describing the key religious events from the first kings of Tibet until the disintegration of the Yarlung empire, Buddhist and Bonpo historians interpret these events from perspectives that are radically different, often even antagonistic. Their polemically charged evaluation of the past demonstrates a need to establish their own religious tradition's legitimate status as orthodox "insiders" (*nang ba*), in contradistinction to their opponents, who are dismissed as heterodox "outsiders" (*phyi ba*). Despite the partisanship and the polemical purpose of their work, Tibetan writers often style their own histories as "clear mirrors" (*gsal ba'i me long*) that faithfully reflect past events without any distortion. What seems most striking to me about the historical accounts of both Bonpos and Buddhists are their symmetries in style and form: they are near mirror images of each other.

In this chapter we will peer into these mirroring histories and investigate what literary frames support them. How do the representations of the past acquire their mimetic effect for Tibetan readers? What literary devices are used in these works to create an aura of authenticity? What do these stylized symmetries tell us about how their respective traditions are constructed? In pursuing answers to these questions, we will embark upon a literary history of Buddhism and Bon, a study of both Buddhist and Bon histories as a literary genre, and a history of their "traditions" as they emerge from that literature.

Here I begin from a different point of departure than most modern studies of Tibetan historiography. For the most part, scholars with an interest in these Tibetan works have raised questions about their accuracy as historical sources: Do they faithfully reflect the past? Can their content be corroborated by our earliest extant evidence, the archeological remains from royal funerary grounds, the few fragmentary inscriptions, or passages from the archaic Tibetan scrolls recovered at Dunhuang? Their objective has been to glean whatever positive information they can from this genre of literature, a genre often marked as problematic by its hyphenated "mythico-historical" or "quasi-historical" content. Its hybrid content invites the critical historian to delve beneath the messy mix of the mythical and the legendary to reach the solid strata of historical events. The favored method involves a type of demythologization, whereby the "fictional" accretions in the text are critically stripped away to lay bare the historical "facts," the real events.[1]

Yet the task of sifting through the "fancy" to find the "facts" in these texts, and likewise the differentiation between "myth" and "history," is fraught with uncertainty and ambiguity, and it is methodologically suspect. The search for a "reliable witness" becomes quite complicated once one begins to compare Buddhist and Bon historical works, with their often dissenting accounts. Evaluative criteria foreign to the Tibetan writers must be introduced, and these criteria often presuppose the worn out distinction between *their* timeless mythical thinking and *our* genuinely historical concern with the past. What remains unexamined is the fundamental issue of *whose* history is really being reconstructed. The traditional approach to these "mythico-historical" works seems so problematic that it may be more fruitful to pursue a different tack and ask, What purpose do these texts serve? What literary techniques do the writers use to achieve that purpose? How useful is our distinction between "myth" and "history" when trying to make sense of these texts?

The line of inquiry adopted here will be concerned less with evaluating which texts accurately reflect real events in Tibet's past than with identifying their symmetries,

the shared literary devices used by the historians to make the past meaningful and coherent. By drawing attention to the Tibetan writers' reliance on similar rhetorical and religious strategies, I will demonstrate the mutual mimicry of Buddhist and Bonpo historians, who operate within the same universe of discourse—even as they present their traditions as distinctly different. Despite their genuine need to promote their own "tradition" as solely authoritative, the Tibetan writers belonging to either religion make rhetorical gestures that imitate the others in rhyming movements. From this perspective the writers—who elsewhere seem so bent on dueling over religious authority in their conflicting versions of the past—look more like two partners dancing a *pas-de-deux*. How this duet is choreographed, the common moves made with tropes, topoi, and methods of emplotment, will be the main subject of the present chapter. Occasionally we will take note of their polemical jousts, and rehearse some of the parry and riposte moves made by the Buddhist and Bonpo historians to create distance and differences between themselves. These texts are not only mirrors in which the writers may ponder their own religious identity, they are also mirrors of the "other" religion, in which their differences and unseemly symmetries are represented and explained. They illustrate a reflexivity that binds them together in a state of mutual indebtedness and creative dissent. Without the other, there can be no duels or duets; without the other, there is no language for the self.

Once Buddhist and Bon writers set out to celebrate the origins and development of their own religion in Tibet, they developed a new discourse about Tibet's past, governed by its own rules of operation and moral imperatives. The most innovative feature of their historiography lies in the presentation of the past in the form of a narrative. This formal feature enabled Tibetan religious historians to claim that their stories about the past were true, both edifying and entertaining, instructive and inspiring to read. Today we know from studies of narrative that this form is no neutral or empty structure that simply imposes order on the past. As Hayden White and others have noted, the narrative form already has a content prior to being filled in with specific events.

Following the lead of White in *The Content of the Form*,[2] we will investigate the specifically Tibetan content of the narrative form used in religious histories, which prefigures the meaning and outcome of events. The historians reveal a desire to moralize the events of which they tell. As writers of allegories they are ultimately concerned with gaining legitimacy and moral authority.

It may come as no surprise to learn that Buddhist and Bon writers considered it their responsibility as historians to identify their religion's origins, plot its progress, and preach its purpose. After all, religious writers tend to wring moral lessons from the past: that is their time-honored duty. Yet historians in Tibet were not always so preoccupied with religious topics, or with recording events for allegorical purposes. If we turn to the earliest form of Tibetan historiography, written on scrolls recovered from the caves of Dunhuang, we see that the writers had no interest in telling a true story about the past. For the anonymous author of the earliest history, the *Royal Annals* (Pelliot tibétain 1288), refused to tell a story at all, and he rarely recorded any event that might be considered of religious significance. Likewise, the author(s) of the work known as the *Old Tibetan Chronicle* (Pelliot tibétain 1287) wrote precious little about Tibetan religion; and though there were stories told in various chapters of the chronicle, in the end the text fails to deliver any resolution in story-like fashion.[3]

Since this chapter will be devoted primarily to Buddhist and Bon historical narratives, it is only appropriate to inaugurate this overview (or historical narrative) by examining the earlier forms of Tibetan history writing. What notions of history are implicit in the *Royal Annals* and *Chronicle*? What kind of historical consciousness do they embody? What might be the meaning of events when they are not represented in a narrative mode, when they seem unable or unwilling to "tell their own story?" Our brief review of these two works as distinct types of historiography, neither religious in purpose nor narrative in form, will throw into relief the innovative features of later Buddhist and Bon histories. Since the *Annals* and *Chronicle* are two of our earliest sources for

understanding the Yarlung period, our review of their content and concerns will help us to gauge the role played by the religious historians in creating a compelling vision of Tibet's golden age, one that grips the Tibetan Buddhist and western imagination even today. We may then determine whether there is a development in the Tibetans' historical consciousness from what we find in the *Annals*, in the *Chronicle*, and finally in the various narratives on religious origins and development, *bon/chos 'byung*.

Our review of Tibetan historiography will also raise comparative issues concerning how different types of history writing are classified and evaluated, and what standards of historicity Tibetan and western historians accept. We will see that distinct genres are thought to represent varying degrees of "meaning" or "reality," but that the criteria used for making such judgments are significantly different for Tibetan and western historians. With regard to western models of historiography, Hayden White believes that they are evaluated according to certain narrative standards: "The *doxa* of the modern historiographical establishment has it that there are three basic kinds of historical representation—the annals, the chronicle, and the history proper—the imperfect "historicality" of two of which is evidenced by their failure to attain to full narrativity of the events of which they treat."[4] The annals and the chronicle may record past events in strict chronological sequence, but most modern historians do not regard them as "realistic" or "meaningful" representations, claims White, because they fail to "narrativize" the events recorded. That is, the events are not presented as if they could tell their own story, and they are not endowed with any moral meaning that is disclosed by the end of the history; thus their meaningfulness seems somewhat empty, their reality suspect. Only the historical narrative is accorded the distinction of being a "realistic" representation, for it fulfills our desire for closure and a meaningful ending, rather than being a mere sequence of events listed chronologically. If White is right about the implicit narrative criteria used by western historians to evaluate the annals, chronicle, and

history "proper," then we would expect to find these judgments present in western scholarship on Tibetan historiography too.

Lest I jump ahead of myself here and give away the ending, I will show some restraint and turn to an examination of the earliest Tibetan historical works that were recovered from the Dunhuang caves. Since these works appear on scrolls that are in a mutilated condition today, without any title or colophon to help us identify the works and their authors, we will first inquire whether the so-called *Royal Annals* (Pelliot tibétain 1288) and the *Old Tibetan Chronicle* (Pelliot tibétain 1287) meet our own criteria as distinct types of historiography. The terms used by scholars to distinguish them as an "annal" and a "chronicle" require some justification, both in terms of western and Tibetan historiographic models. Then we can move on to their subject matter and how it is presented within each text, paying particular attention to the reigns of important kings. Finally we can consider how realistic (rather than historically accurate) each text is, and reflect on what criteria we use in making such judgments.

The Royal Annals

The earliest extant Tibetan history (PT 1288), dating from the mid-eighth century, is aptly designated an "annal."[5] It presents a year-by-year record of events in the Tibetan imperial period from 650-747 CE. In fact, the registration of events in straightforward chronological order is this text's single most important stylistic feature; the author makes no attempt to connect the events into an organized story other than to list them sequentially. In terms of Tibetan classifications of historical literature, this text could be identified as a *lo rgyus*, meaning literally "news of the year" or "tidings of years," which fits our text well as an annual report.[6] However, most Tibetan historical texts designated as *lo rgyus* are not annals at all. Rather than presenting their subject matter year-wise, in strict sequence as annual reports, texts designated as *lo rgyus* often present a narrative of

events in loose chronological order. The term *lo rgyus* comes to mean "story" or "narrative" in general, and a *lo rgyus* might relate stories without any concern for serial chronology. This later meaning of *lo rgyus* as "story" would hardly apply to PT 1288, as it lacks a narrative structure entirely. It has no central subject or location, no identified narrator, and no beginning, middle, or end to mark closure, so that the reader can then see the end in the beginning. Due to the broad semantic field encompassed by the term *lo rgyus*, I will refer to PT 1288 as the *Annals* since it meets the precise criteria of this western historical genre.

Although the author of the *Annals* remains anonymous, it is likely that he served as a state annalist or record keeper (*yig tsangs pa*) working on behalf of the Tibetan imperial government, a position institutionalized after the reign of Srong btsan sgam po.[7] The *Annals* begins by summarizing the last several years of this king's reign, and we might expect to learn a lot about his accomplishments. After all, Srong btsan sgam po is widely celebrated in most Tibetan histories as the king who first promoted Buddhist practice in Tibet, the royal sponsor who oversaw the invention of Tibet's written script, and the codifier of Tibet's first laws. But none of these great deeds receives the slightest notice in the *Annals*, and it appears that little is remembered about his reign in any precise detail.

In the damaged text available to us today, the *Annals* opens by tersely reporting the invitation and arrival in Tibet of the Chinese imperial princess Mun chang Kong jo (Wen Cheng gongzhu). During the same year that she arrived in Tibet we learn that the king of Nepal was killed and his successor acceded to the throne. On the domestic front, the text only relates that the yaks suffered from a great plague that year. Three years then pass before the next incident is announced, when the neighboring king of Zhang zhung, Lig snya shur, was overthrown and all of Zhang zhung was annexed into Tibet. Six years later we learn that Srong btsan sgam po passed away, a contingency disguised in the honorific language befitting royalty: it is said that he "went to heaven" (*dgung du*

gshegso). After this abrupt yet still polite mention of the king's death, the annalist adds that he had cohabitated (*bshos*, "had intercourse") with his Chinese queen Mun chang for three years.[8] This one and only intimate detail of the king's life sets up the expectation that the annalist will proceed to identify his offspring by the Chinese queen, and perhaps explain how this royal heir was determined, but this is not forthcoming. The incidental detail about the king's partnership with the Chinese wife certainly raises a chronological question, since we know that Mun chang had been in Tibet as his queen for much longer than three years. From the somewhat confusing record of these early events, it appears as if a record keeper summed them up from memory at a much later date, so that the space of time between them was only an approximation.[9] The sparse information provided here about the period of Srong btsan sgam po's reign says too little and leaves too many gaps to satisfy most modern historians. Later we will see how Buddhists filled these silences in with different "memories," including his dramatic apotheosis and passing away, when he reveals his true identity as Avalokiteśvara before being absorbed into the statue of that bodhisattva.

The year following Srong btsan sgam po's death is marked in the *Annals* as the Year of the Dog (i.e. 650 CE), apparently the first year for which there were current records. From here until the last entry made during the Year of the Pig (747 CE) the text proceeds in strict chronological order over a ninety-eight year span, and it presents an annual report on the activities of key functionaries in the government. The text measures time in twelve-year cycles, each year bearing the name of an animal: rat, ox, tiger, hare, dragon, snake, horse, sheep, monkey, cock, dog, and pig. The Tibetan twelve-year cycle corresponds to the Chinese model where it had in fact been invented, before it was adopted by the Turks, who spread it throughout Inner Asia.[10] The year by year list of events is clearly marked in time by the regularity of the calendar, which is both continuous and cyclical: time rolls relentlessly onward through these animal cycles. This calendrical structure serves as a kind of measuring container for the annalist, holding the

otherwise disparate events together in a structured whole while marking their temporal distance. In his analysis of medieval annals, Hayden White suggests that the registration of events in a yearly list might explain why the annalist is not bothered (as analytical scholars are today) by the gaps between the events recorded. "The modern scholar seeks fullness and continuity in an order of events; the annalist has both in the sequence of the years." White then raises a rhetorical question: "Which is the more 'realistic' expectation?"[11]

Putting off for now an assessment of the "realism" of the *Annals*, let us first review some of the subjects advanced so succinctly by the annalist. The topics range rather haphazardly from the occasional royal hunting trip to frequent military expeditions, from yak-infecting plagues to the assassinations of kings and high ranking officials, as we learned even from the events summarized before 650. Most consistently, the annalist records from year to year the places where the traveling emperor and his prime minister (*blon che*) resided, as well as the separate places where the summer and winter assemblies (*'dun sa*) took place, and which ministers convened them. Our anonymous annalist devotes considerable more attention to identifying the names of those who convened the assemblies and to locating them in a specific time and place, than to explaining what exactly took place and why. Though he never fails to note diligently the annual or biannual assemblies, it is difficult to determine what occurred in them, or why they always took place in different locations.

What little information there is about the purpose of the assemblies is disclosed in an archaic technical vocabulary. Much of the modern scholarship on the *Annals* by Bacot, Bogoslovski, Macdonald, Pelliot, Róna-Tas, Stein, and Uray has been devoted to philological studies of its administrative terminology and its bureaucratic titles.[12] Debates over the meaning of these official terms and titles have been confined primarily to the lengthy footnotes that are so characteristic of the "scientific" articles written by European philologists, but their meanings are rarely ever fixed. This is not only due to technical

reasons (arising from the archaic character of these terms, which are written in a clumsy cursive difficult to decipher, and then scribbled over with scribal corrections), but also because the annalist provides so little material context. As one Tibetologist explains in a footnote: "As to the functions of these offices, the sources are rather reticent, which alone makes uncertain the interpretations, suggested on etymological grounds, of dignitary names."[13] The *Annals* is deemed especially "reticent" as a source because the annalist seems so unimaginative and stingy, unwilling to provide any detailed information of interest to philologists and social historians today. Perhaps their generous footnotes are meant to compensate for his silence. But their frustration with the annalist's "reticence" might also arise from their own conviction that the annalist let them down as a historian, in his "apparent failure to see that historical events dispose themselves to the percipient eye as stories waiting to be told, waiting to be narrated."[14]

Let us look at one example where the annalist fails to tell us anything useful about what he so dutifully records. The most notable feature of the annual assemblies is that they were convened in different parts of Tibet, often on the outskirts of the expanding empire, in regions like Zhang zhung to the west, Sum pa to the north, and Mdo smad and 'A zha to the northeast. Perhaps the purpose of convening assemblies in such places was to inspect them, or to make the government's administrative power felt there. But there is little agreement among scholars about why the Tibetan emperor or prime ministers made frequent visits to these regions, or what exactly took place at the assemblies. Much of the controversy hinges on the meaning of a term used by the annalist to describe the action performed in these outlying regions by the assembly or prime minister. This word (*mkhos*) appears a dozen times in the *Annals*, and it has been rendered variously as an act of "troop levy," "inspection," "administration," "settlement," "appointment," "assignment," and "institution."[15] These different translations of the archaic and honorific term *mkhos*, which appears only in our text, are based upon etymological arguments that are determined by whatever verbal root the philologists identify as its semantic nucleus (e.g.

sko "to appoint," *bkod* "to establish," *mkho ba* "necessary," '*khod* "to sit down, established"). However, its meaning can only be hypothetical because the annalist offers so little contextual information, and its usage remains uncertain.

If I were to hazard what takes place in these assemblies, and put this in most general terms (in mimicry of the text's own vagueness), it would appear that "measures were taken." Often these measures are economic in nature, and they indicate the Tibetan imperial government's concern with the financial administration of its territories. For example, we read of taxes levied among the subjects (in 693, 708, and 746), property and pastures surveyed, divided, and assessed (in 673, 680, 687, 713, 718, 719, 720, and 746), and grain counted in 719. Sometimes the assemblies take military measures that lead to actual combat. There are records of numerous Chinese soldiers killed (in 670, 695, 729), rebellious subjects suppressed (in 705, 711, 719) and a defensive fortress built in 668.[16] More often however, the military measures taken by the assemblies are administrative, such as when subdued territories are inspected or administered (in 662, 675, 696, 702, 709, 714, 715, 724, 730, 734, 742, 746), or when the soldiers were recorded in large-scale registrations (in 690, 692, 708, 712, 718, 729, 744) that were often marked on red tally sticks (*khram dmar po*).[17] In 654 there was a census initiated by the assembly that served both an economic and military purpose. The census was performed in order to distinguish between the "savage" (*rgod*) and the "tame" (*g.yung*). These evocative terms are in fact social categories: the "savage" refers to those subjects obliged to military service, while the "tame" refers to the group of working people, such as artisans or merchants, who are bound to corvée labor.[18]

As this census illustrates, many of the "measures taken" by the councils requires that things be counted. The administrative concerns evident in these passages relate to the management of imperial property and the maintenance of military strength; both require detailed administrative records in a growing imperial bureaucracy. The verb used in this administrative context is *rtsis*, which means, "counting, numbering, numeration" in

classical Tibetan, but which also means "to write by incising lines" in Old Tibetan. The verb *rtsis* in the *Annals* refers not only to accounts and inventories but also to the drafting of an official appointment in the court.[19] If we recall that our unnamed annalist himself was most likely an official appointment of the court, we see that record keeping and accounting is the common thread running through the entire text. But what remains puzzling is the absence of any information about how the records were used or interpreted by the court. The events listed—whether notes about administrative record keeping, or outbreaks of smallpox and yak epidemics, royal hunts, or deaths in the royal family—seem to have the same degree of importance or unimportance. Perhaps their importance consists in nothing other than their having been recorded, registered in bureaucratic red ink in consecutive years, just as a military census would reduce individuals to mere marks on red tally sticks. There are no other clues to explain why these events were deemed important enough to be singled out for remembrance.

If we were to diagram how the *Annals* represents the past, the events recorded would only be two-dimensional, locatable in space and time but still topographically flat. There would be no vertical axis indicating value, and the only temporal landmarks on the horizon are the animal names of the calendar. Despite this flattened two-dimensional perspective, there is little reason to deny the realism of the account. After plodding through the annalist's record of occurences, written in such a sober style, the events read as actual events that are quite unremarkable in their reality, but they are clearly marked by their dates. This regularity signals a concrete seriality, rather than the surreal unreality of dreamtime. The chronological framework provided by the *Annals* has in fact proved very valuable to social historians interested in reconstructing the timeline of the Yarlung dynasty.[20]

For the historian hoping to learn about the role of religion in Tibetan society however, the *Annals* proves disappointingly mute. Surprisingly, there is no mention of the construction of temples at Lhasa under Srong btsan sgam po or his successors, a topic

that becomes so central to later Buddhist historiography. Even Lhasa, the capitol of central Tibet, was not known by the *Annals*, for this was a later name substituted for *Ra sa*, "the place of the goats." *Ra sa* is mentioned only once in the year 710, when the second Chinese imperial princess, Kim shang Kong jo (Jin Cheng gongzhu), arrives at the "Deer Park of Ra sa."[21] Evidently this place, known for its goats and deer parks in 710, was not yet recognized as "the place of the gods" (*lha sa*), the pilgrimage center for all devout Tibetan Buddhists. Likewise, religious ideas and moral ideals will not be found anywhere in the text. Ritual activities too are almost entirely absent, with the single exception of the mortuary rites performed for members of the royal family. Brief notice is given of the emperor's death, the storage of his embalmed body in a special house for the dead (*ring khang*), and then the burial of the body in a tomb one year later. But the matter-of-fact mention of the royal mortuary rites does not evoke any strong moral sentiments: the text offers no eulogy for the deceased member of the royal family, no glorification of their heroic deeds or their moral stature.

Apart from the regular reports on the assemblies and the places of royal residence, the *Annals* displays an odd lack of continuity in the events recorded. There often appears to be no connection whatsoever between the events of one year and the next. Occasionally the annalist touches on subjects that might seem potentially dramatic, such as when foreign envoys come to pay tribute (*phyag tshal*) at court, or when treatises are made or broken, or when imperial alliances are forged through marriages. Such events raise our hopes that the annalist might leave behind his laconic style and launch into a three dimensional narrative, one that alludes to the motives of the participants and that derives some meaning from their actions. However, these subjects are always presented obliquely and then dropped—their meaning eludes us. So strong is our need for meaningful closure that by the end of the *Annals*, trailing off in the Year of the Pig (the annalist's yesteryear), we are left frustrated and disappointed. There are too many

questions still unanswered, too much information left out. Even the few topical threads running through the *Annals* are left loose to hang, untidy and untied in any finished knot.

However realistic and even chronologically accurate we may judge the *Annals* then, it still lacks a quality of historical consciousness found in more narrative forms of writing. Hayden White claims that narrativity can only occur when reality is socially contested, that is, when there are two possible ways to tell a story about the same events. "Unless at least two version of the same set of events can be imagined," he argues, "there is no reason for the historian to take upon himself the authority of giving the true account of what really happened."[22] Such competing versions presume a developed consciousness of a social center, a focal point from which one can rank the importance of events. For our annalist, this social center seems missing: his eccentric position seems to be as mobile as the emperor's various places of residence. Events do not appear contested for him, so he has no need to claim the authority to narrate, to set things straight, or to represent the events as if they could "tell their own story." All that is required is that he formally records events in proper chronological order.

Tibetologists have often speculated that the historiographic model for the *Royal Annals* must have come from China, which is certainly the source for the *Annals*' calendrical system, the duodenary cycle bearing animal names. The annals model of recording events at the Chinese court (*benji* or *biannian*) has a long history in China, dating back to the Chou dynasty. Many of the earliest Chinese annals are strikingly similar in form and content to our Tibetan *Annals*. For example, there is the well known *Spring and Autumn Annals* (*Qunchiu*) with records of the state of Lu covering from 722-481 BCE. Other early annals, which are extant in only fragmentary form today but often are cited in more comprehensive histories, include the *Bamboo Annals* (*Zhushu jinian*) from the state of Wei, and the annals of the state of Qin. All of these works present very brief annual (or even seasonal) reports about court events, military expeditions, solar eclipses and so on.[23]

The Qin annals served as an important source for the most famous work of Chinese historiography, the *Records of the Historian* (*Shiji*) written by Sima Qian around 100 BCE. On the basis of the Qin annals, Sima Qian records that in 753 BCE at the court of Duke Wen, "scribes were appointed for the first time, in order to record events." Sima Qian then adds, "among the people, there were many who were reformed."[24] Despite the moral drawn by Sima Qian about the positive social effect of the court scribes, it appears that their earliest purpose was ritualistic rather than moralistic, their primary task being to present a careful record of the rites (and especially the divination rites) that took place regularly at the ruler's ancestral temple. With the unification of the Han dynasty, the Chinese annalists became increasingly concerned with recording the administrative tasks of a centralized bureaucracy. Court annals served a new practical purpose: they were written to educate statesmen in the art of governing and to inform officials about bureaucratic practice by offering historical precedents.[25] This form of annals was adopted by later historians like Sima Qian, whose *Records of the Historian* devotes the first of its five sections to annals. However, what distinguishes the work of later annalists like Sima Qian from their predecessors is that their work is more than a mere record of court events or bureaucratic business listed chronologically. They are imbued with the "Confucian" or Literati value of serving as a guide to conduct, with the explicit goal of offering moral inspiration to subsequent generations of rulers and officials. Even the annals genre succumbs to the widespread tendency found in official Chinese historiography to "rectify" the past, whereby events are given their own moral evaluations.

This later moralistic style of Chinese historiography obviously did not inform the composition of our *Annals*. However, Géza Uray has posited that the Tibetan *Royal Annals* was written "to serve as a manual for the art of governing and for bureaucratic practice."[26] While it seems likely that the *Annals* served some official bureaucratic purpose, it hardly seems appropriate to describe it as a "manual." To qualify as such, one would expect to find at least some explanation of how the various bureaucratic

institutions ought to function, with useful reference material about administrative organization for bureaucrats in need of precedents. All that we can glean from the *Annals*, however, is that administrative measures took place, not *how* or *why* they occurred. Even Uray himself has admitted that so many of the administrative terms remain uncertain in meaning because so little is said about what purpose was served by various institutions and practices. The *Annals* does not read as a normative work that upholds the moral and pragmatic purpose of good record keeping. It simply notes that record keeping occurred, of which the text itself is yet another example, without serving as an exemplar.

One question worth considering is why the annals form of historiography never became popular in Tibet. Apart from one other fragment of annals that was recovered from Dunhuang,[27] it appears that the annals genre never gained widespread favor in Tibet. Was it an experiment in historiography borrowed from China that failed to capture the imagination of Tibetans? Or did the annals genre simply fail to serve any social need once the Tibetan imperial administration changed, only to disintegrate entirely by the mid-ninth century? Both reasons seem plausible, for the "Tibetan imagination" must always be informed by social needs. It may be speculated that once the Tibetan administration became more centralized, especially under the reign of Khri srong lde btsan, the bulk of the *Annals* reports on the places of royal residence would have been unnecessary, for the emperor would stay situated in one place. Later, with the decline of the Yarlung empire in the ninth century, we would expect the annual reports on the imperial territories to decrease. However, these changes in the imperial administration would only explain how we should find different topics as the primary focus of any later Tibetan annals; it does not account for how the annals form itself would eventually seem "outdated." We will return to this issue after we have examined the *Old Tibetan Chronicle*, for this later text offers us important clues to answer the question of why the annals were not valued.

The Old Tibetan Chronicle

The next early work of Tibetan historiography that we will consider, PT 1287, is more difficult to classify than the *Annals*, and even its authorship remains uncertain. The scroll on which it is written is truncated and disorganized, and like the *Annals* it lacks both a title and colophon. Traditionally Tibetologists have referred to it as *The Old Tibetan Chronicle* or simply as the *Chronicle*, but this identification is problematic. Beginning with the legendary king Dri gum and continuing up to the reign of Khri srong lde btsan, its historical scope far exceeds what is reported in the *Annals*. Yet the order followed in the text is not always chronological. While the text manifests a concern with serial progression, particularly in its genealogical sections, there is a conflation of the reigns of Srong btsan sgam po (r. 618-649) and Khri srong lde btsan (r. 756-797), where events from their reigns are shuffled. Also, the last sections of the text describe events that occurred during the life of Khri 'Dus srong, whose reign (685-704) had already been described earlier.[28]

These discontinuities puzzled the first Tibetologists to study the text, who tried to explain them as narrative flashbacks. Then Géza Uray proved quite conclusively that they arose during the process of transcribing our extant copy, when two parts of the text were pasted to each other out of order to form a disorganized scroll.[29] This mistake by the compilers prevented the scroll from unfolding the past in neat serial succession, but this is no fault of the author. Still, one might question whether this work merits being classified as a chronicle since much of its content is episodic. Succeeding sections skip over time without any notice paid to the cycle of animal years. The strict calendrical precision found in the *Annals* is missing altogether in this "chronicle" without dates. There is certainly no unfolding plot structure that links each event and points towards a conclusion, as one expects to find in a fully narrativized history.

Before we accept or reject the conventional designation of PT 1287 as a "chronicle" we ought to consider how Tibetan historians would classify the work. Two related subgenres of Tibetan historical literature seem most applicable: it might be classified as either a *rgyal rabs* or a *blon rabs*. If one were to read only the first section of the work, which presents the famous story of the life and death of king Dri gum, the text would fit the category of *rgyal rabs*, since the early demise of Dri gum problematizes the issue of royal (*rgyal*) succession (*rabs*). The category of *blon rabs* is used less frequently to categorize works of Tibetan political history, but what makes it so convincing in this context is that the term is used by the author himself to describe a section of the text. Immediately following the story of Dri gum we find a paragraph that lists the succession (*rabs*) of the great ministers (*blon che*) who worked under the Tibetan kings after Dri gum.[30] Based only on these first two sections then, both *rgyal rabs* and *blon rabs* seem appropriate depending upon whether the king or the ministers are its primary focus. But in the sections that follow it is not always clear who is the main subject. Both kings and ministers are featured in stories and in songs, often sung as an exchange between them, while genealogical lists are abandoned and the issue of succession grows less important.

It might be objected that the distinction between *rgyal rabs* and *blon rabs* is somewhat artificial, since the reign of kings and the work of their ministers overlap and support each other. However, the fact that Tibetan scholars distinguish between these types and that the author himself uses one of the categories, in implied contrast to the other, leads us to consider these terms more closely. Like the broad semantic field encompassed by the term *lo rgyus*, the meaning of *rgyal rabs* is difficult to pin down precisely in terms of its etymology and usage by Tibetan historians. A *rgyal rabs* often refers to a work listing the successive members in the royal lineage, in which case "royal genealogy" is a fitting translation; but it also comes to mean a narrative account or story (*rabs*) about a king or kings, often rendered as a "royal chronicle."[31] Just as the etymology of *lo rgyus* literally means a successive account of yearly events, but over

time *lo rgyus* comes to be used by Tibetans to describe any story or narrative, likewise the strict etymology of *rabs* refers to a lineage or succession of people, such as kings or ministers, but in later usage it is applied to any stories featuring kings or their ministers (as a *blon rabs*). What we see in both cases is the development of a system of classification concerned first with elements of succession (whether years or genealogies) that later becomes a broader class of stories or narratives. Thus the Tibetan terms available to us for classifying these historical texts have their own history of usage, a history that leads us to the genre of narrative.

The earliest known authors to assign the title of *rgyal rabs* to their own work are the two Sa skya pa patriarchs, Rje btsun Grags pa rgyal mtshan (1147-1216) and 'Phags ba Blo gros rgyal mtshan (1235-1280), who wrote histories with an identical title, *Bod kyi rgyal rabs* (*The Royal Genealogies of Tibet*). Both begin their royal genealogies with a description of the reign of Srong btsan sgam po and proceed to list the successive kings, their queens, and ministers, until the Yarlung dynasty disintegrates. Giuseppe Tucci, who first translated these two *rgyal rabs* into English, argued that both histories were indebted to sources like the *Royal Annals* and the *Old Tibetan Chronicle*, since their genealogies and dates always agree with these two ancient works.[32] Despite the continuity between these first official *rgyal rabs* and our earlier text, the subject matter of our text includes more than bare genealogies of kings or ministers listed sequentially. It also includes several complete paragraphs written in a literary or epic style, which celebrate the great historical personages and events in the founding of the Yarlung dynasty, including the unification of the country under Srong btsan sgam po.

There are sixteen sections or paragraphs that make up PT 1287, and each paragraph constitutes a distinct whole. Even after sorting out the "cut and paste" mistakes made by later compilers and rearranging the text so that the reigns of the kings descend in order, we find discontinuity in style and topic when we move between the paragraphs. The first paragraph presents the story of how king Dri gum was killed, leaving a polluted

corpse behind on earth, and how the heir to the throne was banished from the kingdom. It is written in an archaic epic style that is enigmatic and obscure to the modern reader, full of inexplicable twists and turns. Even to make sense of it in simple narrative terms the reader is forced to make some rather bold interpretive leaps. For the Tibetans too, the story of Dri gum's death signals a significant "break with tradition." The abrupt break in the royal line requires a narrative to explain how the king's corpse was purified through ritual and the rightful heir replaced to the throne. Without rehearsing Dri gum's story and identifying what seem to be breaks in narrative continuity, I would submit that the story was well enough known to its Tibetan readers that they could "fill in the gaps." That is, the first section may be composed of fragments drawn from various epic and oral traditions familiar to its Tibetan audience, and knowledge of these traditions would enable a fluent reading.[33]

In the second paragraph there is a clear shift away from a dramatic epic style to a simple list of great ministers in succession. It only departs from the list to present a few stock phrases that eulogize the ministers' magical powers and their limitless wisdom as advisors, special qualities that might be illustrated with a telling episode from a minister's life. The term *blon rabs* appears at the beginning of this second section almost as a chapter title. In what follows we see that its content satisfies both characteristics of the subgenre, with its generational list interrupted by a few narrative episodes concerning certain ministers.

The third and fourth paragraphs jump to events during the reigns of Stag bu snya bzigs and Gnam ri slon mchan, the grandfather and father of Srong btsan sgam po respectively. Here we find the text returning to the literary mode of a descriptive narrative. Considerable attention is paid to the social dynamics of the Tibetan feudal system, based upon a hierarchical structure and bonds of dependence. In its stories about the Tibetan sovereigns, clan chiefs, lords, and vassals, much is made of the exchanges necessary to make the feudal system work: the granting of land and titles by the lords in

exchange for the labor rendered by subjects. It also describes the feudal rites aimed at consecrating bonds of loyalty. For instance, there are oaths of fealty (*bro 'tsald, mna' 'bor*) exchanged between loyal subjects, who accept serving their lord like a "mule accepts its saddle,"[34] and the sovereign, who in turn swears to uphold the subject's possessions and privileges. In the context of this hierarchical structure of reciprocity, there is an obvious concern with the justness of the exchanges, that the subjects were amply compensated for their good work. When services go unrewarded, or the work for a lord becomes too oppressive, the text tells how the vassals revolt, an event alluded to at one point with the expression "when the mule is overburdened, the saddle breaks" (*dre'u sgal te bse' sga bchag*). The vassals then seek the support of other lords or of the royal sovereign himself.[35]

A just resolution does not always occur. There are a number of stories of treachery and intrigue, especially by plotting ministers who would resort to poison for committing assassinations of convenience. Such instances of the immoral manipulation of power occur most frequently during the reigns of weak rulers. The text betrays a bias in relation to these weak rulers, for their reigns receive scant attention, and the focus shifts to the Tibetan ministers, the feudal nobles, and their serfs (*bran*). The Russian Tibetologist Bogoslovski was the first to recognize that the text exalts the reigns of strong kings like Srong btsan sgam po and Khri srong lde btsan, but it remains quiet about weak rulers such as Mang srong mang btsan (r. 649-677), who turned his power and authority over to aristocratic families. In terms of political ideology this slighting of ineffective rulers and the glorification of strong ones points to the necessity of centralized power and state unity. Bogoslovski argues that the text's tacit support for a strong centralized government enables us to date its composition to the period of crisis following Khri srong lde btsan's reign (r. 756-797), when the Tibetan government declined while the aristocracy rose in power.[36] Other scholars agree that this work dates from the first half of the ninth century.[37]

Before we examine how the text represents the powerful Tibetan emperors, let us return to the topic of how to classify the text's mixed genres, for it bears on the issue of its authorship. The summary of the first four paragraphs alone should indicate that our work is heterogeneous in form, a composition that addresses different topics and uses distinctive styles. Judging from the discontinuities that jar the reader when moving between paragraphs, it seems likely that the "author" of this work was really its compiler, who drew upon whatever genealogies, songs, and stories he had access to, including epic oral traditions.[38] Our compiler invested little effort trying to integrate all sixteen paragraphs into a narrative structure that flows seamlessly from one topic to another. This work does not qualify as a fully narrative history—there is no plot structure linking each event and pointing toward a summary conclusion, nor is there closure at the end, since the text simply terminates without resolution— but still, it brings us closer to the narrativized form of histories written by Buddhists and Bonpos. For the purposes of this narrative on the development of Tibetan historiography, the text serves as a segue between the non-narrative *Annals* and the narrativized religious histories written by Buddhists and Bonpos.

Situated in this intermediary position, PT 1287 corresponds most closely to the "chronicle" genre of historiography analyzed by White, a form written with a higher degree of historical self-consciousness than the yearly registration of events in annals. Drawing upon Hegel's philosophy of history, White distinguishes between the annals and a chronicle in terms of the interest they manifest in legal issues, legitimacy, and authority:

> Once we have been alerted to the intimate relationship that Hegel suggests exists between law, historicality, and narrativity, we cannot but be struck by the frequency with which narrativity, whether of the fictional or the factual sort, presupposes the existence of a legal system against which or on behalf of which the typical agents of a narrative account militate. And this raises the suspicion that narrative in general, from the folktale to the novel, from the annals to the fully realized "history," has to do with the topics of law, legality, legitimacy, or, more generally, authority. And indeed, when we look at what is supposed to be the next stage in the

> evolution of historical representation after the annals form, namely, the chronicle, this suspicion is borne out. The more historically self-conscious the writer of any form of historiography, the more the question of the social system and the law that sustains it, the authority of this law and its justification, and threats to the law occupy his attention.[39]

White's observation that historical self-consciousness arises once the historian manifests an interest in the legal system as a subject, from which arises a concern with legal authority and justice, certainly holds true for our text, in stark contrast to the earlier *Annals*. What is nonexistent in the administrative records of the *Annals* but what emerges in the characterization of Tibetan feudal society by PT 1287 is an obsession with the moral use and immoral abuse of power, in what is just and unjust. We have noted the desire to evaluate the events it describes in moral terms, which becomes especially apparent in its descriptions of the system of reciprocity governing Tibetan feudal society. We will find even more examples of this when we turn to the text's glorification of Tibetan emperors as moral exemplars. But to put to rest the problem of how we might categorize this text, which up to this point I have only identified as PT 1287, I will refer to it hereafter as the *Chronicle* as it is conventionally designated. For whatever problems with serial chronology are found within, it otherwise satisfies the basic criteria identified by White as a genre of historiography located between the annals and the historical narrative.[40]

One significant difference between the *Annals* and the *Chronicle* is that the latter text has a proper geographic center in the Yarlung Tsangpo river valley, where the emperor resided. The term used in the *Chronicle* to denote the Tibetan state is *chab srid*, meaning literally "river state," an archaic phrase that is later replaced in classical Tibetan by *rgyal srid*, "royal power, kingdom, or state." As a metaphor *chab srid* connects the extent of Tibet's royal dominion to water and rivers: "the kingdom was extended in the water" (*chab srid ni chur bsrings*). Yet the metaphor also becomes associated with the idea expressed in the verb *chab gcig tu byed pa*, meaning, "to make the waters one," and therefore "to unite."[41] Tibet is identified in the *Chronicle* with the Tsangpo river, for the

Tibetan "river state" consisted of mutual alliances between the valleys of separate tributaries that emptied into this river. Power was conceptualized as the fluid pattern of the Tsangpo's "flow" (*rgyun*), which unified the Tibetan state both physically and symbolically.[42]

Power tends to be centered most on the emperor, but the *Chronicle* makes clear that the "river state" entailed an ever-changing system of alliances and counter-alliances that operated at all levels of society. These alliances were often ritualized as a process of exchange, as we have seen when oaths of fealty are pledged to a sovereign in exchange for the subject's rights over land. So frequently do these oaths occur that the *Chronicle* may seem repetitive to the reader today. Yet it would be mistaken to view these relationships as fixed within a rigid feudal hierarchy. Each narrative episode presented in the various sections involves the establishment of a relationship. It soon becomes clear that no relationship or alliance is fixed and enduring: relationships must be constantly renegotiated, often through ritualized exchange. When all these episodes are read together we see a series of transformations enacted in the feudal relationships, as new political alliances and economic bonds of dependence emerge. Thus, the repetitiveness of the episodes does not simply reproduce the status quo, as Marxist historians like Bogoslovski claim,[43] but keeps changing it. However much we may experience repetition, there is nothing static about the sense of the past expressed by the *Chronicle*.

The *Chronicle* exerts a subtle centrifugal pull on its subject when it celebrates Tibet's unified state during the reign of strong emperors. Unlike in the *Annals*, there is a very strong sense of a social center present in the *Chronicle* that is most evident in the ideology of divine royalty. The Tibetan sovereigns, who are idealized as the embodiments of moral and cosmic order, are said to descend "like rain" from the heavens to serve as the protector of men on earth, where they preside over their "river state." While the *Chronicle* pays homage to a number of Tibetan emperors for their divine qualities and just rule, two sovereigns in particular are singled out for special exaltation:

Khri Srong btsan (sgam po) and Khri srong lde btsan. Their moral qualities are eulogized, their magical power and wisdom are proclaimed, and their leadership is praised especially for the innovations in law and religion that they introduced. The *Chronicle* paints an idealistic picture of their righteous reigns, with subjects living in harmony, ministers eager to perform heroic deeds, and an ever-expanding empire, as other kings willingly submit and pay tribute to the emperor. The harmony achieved by Srong btsan sgam po and Khri srong lde btsan has cosmic repercussions too, expressed in even more moist metaphors: the sky and the earth are said to rejoice, bringing fertile rain to the land.[44]

According to the *Chronicle* what innovations are introduced by these two sovereigns? Srong btsan is clearly credited with the invention of a written script and the codification of Tibet's first legal codes, while Khri srong lde btsan is remembered for sponsoring the introduction of Buddhism. Later Buddhist historians will honor Srong btsan sgam po for first supporting Buddhism as a Dharma King (*chos rgyal*), and claim that the invention of a written script was motivated by his pious desire to see Buddhist texts translated into Tibetan. However, the *Chronicle* mentions Buddhism not once in relation to Srong btsan. Here is all that the *Chronicle* records about Srong btsan and the invention of writing:

> Formerly Tibet had no writing, but it was invented in this emperor's reign. During Khri Srong btsan's reign all the excellent texts on Tibetan customs appeared, on the great law code and Tibetan morals (*gtsug lag*), the hierarchy of ministers, the respective powers of the great and small, rewards for good deeds, punishments for evil and deceit, the counting of skins and yokes for pasturelands, the equalization of the rivers, duties levied by (fixed) units of volume, weight, and so on.[45]

This passage points to a very different result of literacy than the translation of Indian Buddhist works. Writing allowed the Tibetan political system to become standardized, for the powers of functionaries were explicitly determined in a hierarchy. Writing enabled the new legal edicts to be codified, and it fixed the rewards for good work and

punishment for bad deeds. In sum, writing is valued for contributing to the organization of a bureaucratic system, a system merely glimpsed in those passages of the *Annals* where accounting played such a central role.

These moral qualities and political insights are considered part of Srong btsan's divine character. In fact, they are even built into his name. Earlier in this same section of the *Chronicle* the emperor Srong btsan and his minister Mgar are praised in song during the drinking festivities that took place after the defeat of the Zhang zhung king. What follows is an etymological explanation of how the emperor came to be called Srong btsan sgam po:

> Above, as a lord of deep insight (there was) Khri Srong brtsan, below, as a wise minister, [Mgar] Stong rtsan Yul zhung....All the excellent texts of the Tibetan customs appeared from the time of the Mighty One Khri Srong brtsan. (Therefore) he received from all the people remembering his benevolence the name "The Righteous and Mighty One With Deep Insight" [*srong brtsan sgam po*].[46]

Khri srong lde btsan is likewise represented as just and wise. The *Chronicle* associates the introduction of Buddhism under his reign with the due compensation given for good deeds, and the reasonable punishment imposed for bad deeds. It then idealizes the effects of this Buddhist-influenced policy:

> In the time of Khri srong lde btsan, as the religion (*chos*) was excellent and the dominion vast, the king upheld these between heaven and earth. His great wisdom in governing (*gtsug lag*), which makes him sovereign and master over man and animals, makes him an appropriate model (*dpe*) for men. Compensation for good deeds was given with pleasure; punishment for bad deeds was imposed with discernment. Respect for wisdom and courage increased. Religion (*chos*) cured the evil ways of vulgar people.

The passage then proceeds to celebrate the great ministers who governed in unanimous agreement, without any dissension. They competed among each other only for wisdom, bravery, and compassion. Those with these qualities were promoted to higher ranks, so that each one reached his appropriate place in the hierarchy. The passage ends with more

praise for the king, "who upon receiving the incomparable religion of the Buddha (*sangs rgyas kyi chos bla na myed pa*), built temples everywhere, in the center and at the borders of the country. After he established Buddhism and thought about everyone with compassion, he was liberated from saṃsāra and attained nirvāṇa."[47]

A reader familiar with Buddhist literature would expect this stock phrase to serve as the grand finale to the entire text. After all, nothing surpasses nirvāṇa as a full stop. But our chronicler seems blithely unaware of this opportunity for closure, and he continues on somewhat awkwardly to list the warring expeditions led by ministers and clan chieftains against China and others on Tibet's imperial borders. The impression left is that the Buddhist rhetoric invoked by the chronicler was meant only to supplement the traditional way of paying homage to divine kings as sovereigns and saviors.

The idealized images of these emperors' sovereignty stand in relief to the histrionic disputes between ministers and emperor presented elsewhere in the *Chronicle*, disputes that are often sung in songs of verbal combat. The text is filled with repartee songs and clever riddles exchanged between ministers, who vie for recognition from the emperor. The ministers try to outdo each other in their boastful songs of self-glorification (*mgur*), or in taunting songs (*mchid*) with insults leveled against their opponents. Sometimes the emperor himself intercedes to put a minister in his place. Khri 'Dus srong is credited with the following song about his minister Mgar Khri 'bring after he fell from royal favor. In the allusive style of a *mchid* that hints at blame, 'Dus srong compares his minister to an "earth-bound beetle" who aspires to rise in status and fly into the heavens, which would upset the natural order of things. In the end though, the beetle only becomes food for the hawk. The song begins with the king invoking the days of yore, when everything was as it should be:

Oh at the very beginning

In the most ancient times
All was so well ordered
Beneath the zenith blue
Upon this earthly surface.
The sky did not collapse,
The earth did not cave in,
The sun shone in the sky,
The earth was nicely warm.
The feathers were well fixed [to our arrows].
If you looked at them, how fine they were!
If you let them fly, the deer lay dead!
As deer were slain, so men had food.

After setting this idyllic scene in the past, 'Dus srong turns to the unruly present:

Oho but nowadays
The earth-bound beetle
Aspires to act like a bird!
It tries to fly in the sky,
But it has no wings for flight!
Even if it had wings to fly,
The zenith blue is much too high.
It could not pass the clouds.
Neither reaching the heavens
Nor gaining the earth
Neither high enough nor low enough
It serves as food for the hawk.

In the small land of the Little Bird
A subject aspires to be king.
The son of Mgar hoped to be king
Like a frog that wishes to fly![48]

On other occasions, songs with cleverly disguised allegorical meanings are sung in which the art of communicating political messages is valued. For example, one of Srong btsan sgam po's sisters, Sad ma kar, who had been given away in a marriage alliance to the king of Zhang zhung, sings a song for her brother's ears about how to track down, surround, and slay a "wild yak" in the northern pastures. Sad ma kar's song is a thinly veiled political allegory encouraging the Tibetan ruler to lead a military expedition and ambush the Zhang zhung king, her husband.[49] The subsequent assassination of king Lig myi rhya (=Lig snya shur of the *Annals*) marks Tibet's assimilation of the Zhang zhung empire, a pivotal event not only in the *Chronicle* but in later Bonpo histories. What is indisputable is that this important military event takes place during Srong btsan sgam po's reign according to both the *Chronicle* and the *Annals*, yet every Bon history places it during the reign of Khri srong lde btsan. We may well question whether the military expedition against Lig myi rhya was launched by a song sung by Sad ma kar who, the *Chronicle* tells us, was unhappy living in the desolate wastes of Zhang zhung and sorely missed her homeland.

While there is no time here to analyze these songs' allusive style, their nature metaphors, and their rhythmic syntax, the songs should draw our attention to this work's carefully fashioned discourse, to its poetry. They prove very difficult to translate, not only because the language is obscure and the metaphors are elusive, but due to the form itself. Its metrical syntax is foreign to us. The songs are fashioned into a form whose structure of meaning is culturally specific, and nearly impossible to duplicate meaningfully in translation. What makes the songs intriguing and intelligible, however, is that they appear within a narrative episode that itself "makes sense" to the contemporary

reader. The whole episode seems intuitively knowable to us because it can be translated into a telling. Once read within a narrative frame, which has its own logic and a universal appeal, the songs acquire meaning and even the weight of historical substance. Even the most hard-nosed historians and philologists seem susceptible to the fictional coherence created by narrative.

The few Tibetologists to study these songs closely have regarded them not as fictions invented by the author/compiler of the *Chronicle*, but as extemporaneous improvisations delivered by ministers and emperors skilled in oratorical jousting. Once these songs are deciphered, their allusive metaphors tracked down, and their political allegories appreciated, it then seems natural for the scholar to accept them as spontaneous creations, just as the text proclaims.[50] What lends credence to this reading is the notion that ancient Tibet was steeped in oral traditions, with national bards and state-supported storytellers (*sgrung*) rehearsing songs and stories about divine kings and clan ancestors. Perhaps the ministers and emperors of ancient Tibet could break out spontaneously into lyrical songs, or use songs as a medium to deliver veiled yet potent words that altered the course of Tibetan history. But it seems more reasonable to read the songs and witty repartee found in the *Chronicle* as a collection of verses and events invented, or "remembered," or at least edited by the author/compiler, not as an ethnographic record that accurately reports exchanges and dialogue between ministers and kings. Perhaps these songs were learned through oral tradition, but once they were written down in the *Chronicle* they were tailored to fit the narrative logic that governs each of its sections.

There is evidence that at least some of the songs owe their form to the compiler of the *Chronicle*, and that their content originates not in ancient Tibetan oral traditions but in Chinese historical works. Tsuguhito Takeuchi has demonstrated that an anecdote from the *Shiji* by Sima Qian was used by the compiler of the *Chronicle*, put into the mouths of Kyung po Zu tse and Seng go Myi chen.[51] This adaptation of a Chinese anecdote does not prove that the Tibetan compiler of the *Chronicle* had direct access to the *Shiji*. Rather,

what seems more plausible to Takeuchi is that the anecdote in question was quoted in a Tang period commentary to an anthology, the *Wenxuan*, one of the Chinese texts sent to the Tibetan court in 730 at the request of Princess Jin Cheng (Kim shang Kong jo).[52] The *History of the Tang* (*Tang shu*) affirms that the classical culture of China made a profound impression on the Tibetan kings and their court, and it seems probable that Chinese literary compilations such as the *Wenxuan* and *Zuozuan* served as a model for our Tibetan chronicle. These Chinese works, which link events not in mere chronological sequence but in a causal sequence based upon an implicit moral order, were the most likely sources of inspiration for the compiler of the *Chronicle*.

However much the carefully composed or borrowed literary language of the *Chronicle* may discredit its "realism" in our eyes—especially in contrast to the *Annals*' stark presentation of the "facts"—it certainly makes the *Chronicle* much easier to enjoy. The stories, songs, and riddles in the *Chronicle* add flesh and blood to the bare chronological skeleton of events reported by the *Annals*. Here we might also recall Hayden White's point that a narrative only emerges when events are contested, when there are two possible ways to construe the past. The songs in the *Chronicle* are an excellent example of such contests. Their presence not only adds drama to the narrative of events, they suggest too that the compiler of the *Chronicle* felt a strong need to explain what *really* happened during various reigns of the emperors—in an edifying and stylish manner, no less.

Although there is a much stronger narrative coherence to the *Chronicle*, due in part to the author's desire to allegorize the past, the work nonetheless breaks off abruptly in the reign of Khri srong lde btsan, in the midst of reports of battles fought on the Tibetan frontier. Even allowing for the mutilation of the text at the bottom of the scroll, there would still be no satisfactory narrative closure for this *Chronicle*. Missing at its end is any moral principle by which we can look back over the episodes it records and determine whether they are resolved fairly, in a story-like way. Instead we are once again

left hanging, without a final moral to the various stories involving the Tibetan sovereigns, ministers, clan chiefs, lords and vassals.

Buddhist and Bon Histories as Narratives: A Preview

Our quest for narrative closure brings us finally to the religious histories written by Buddhists and Bonpos, which qualify as fully realized narratives, even if much of their historical content seems suspect. What are the salient features of their narratives? In brief, Buddhist and Bon historians place their subjects within a cosmic temporal framework characterized by alternating periods of manifestation and dissolution, of light and darkness. This cyclical pattern is endowed with moral meaning, for reality is identified with the social order, and historical events further establish that order. We are told the story of the vicissitudes of religion: its birth, growth, decline, and rebirth. The compelling force of the enlightened teachings are described as they spread in the land of Tibet, peaking at a glorious golden age, only to be followed by periods of severe persecution by demonic kings and heterodox heretics, intimating the inevitable decline into a dark, degenerate age. Ultimately, the historians are concerned that the enlightened forces prevail over the demonic, so that their religion becomes firmly established the Land of Snows.

That religion eventually triumphs in Tibet can be no accident, according to these allegorical histories. What upholds the righteousness of religion (whether *Bon* or *Chos*), what ensures the pure continuity of tradition, are the shared religious doctrines of karma (*las*), emanation bodies (*sprul sku*), and the prayers (*smon lam*) and prophecies (*lung bstan*) uttered by enlightened beings. The fruition of positive karma or the powerful effect of past prophecies enables the corrosive effects of time to be dissolved. Karmic seeds always blossom in the future, prayers and prophecies of enlightened teachers always prevail, or else these teachers are reborn later in degenerate times to revive the

tradition to its pristine purity. Events are swept up in the surging tide of moral forces. Closure is achieved at the end of the narrative by casting light back on the implicit meanings that were immanent in all of the events from the beginning. The explicit moralism of the ending signals to us that the narrative is finished, even if the real work of religion must always remain unfinished.

Reading Between *Bon/Chos 'Byung*: Genre, Plagiarism, and Truth

Before delving in detail into the literary features of their narrative form, rhetorical style, and religious purpose, it would be useful to consider what kinds of Buddhist and Bon works qualify as "religious histories." My survey here will be limited for the most part to those texts classified by Tibetan scholars as *chos 'byung* ("origins of religion," or more specifically, "origins of Buddhism"), though Bonpo scholars describe their own histories as *bon bstan 'byung* ("origins of Bon teachings"). For shorthand I will refer to these religious histories simply as *bon/chos 'byung*, so as not to slight the Bon tradition.

Many *bon/chos 'byung* describe the origins and early history of their religion in India or Zhang zhung, and some pay little or no attention to how their religion is transmitted to Tibet.[53] While histories that focus only on the origins of religion in foreign lands manifest the same patterns and narrative form, my particular interest lies in those historical narratives that present the story of the early dissemination and subsequent persecution of religion in ancient Tibet. One of the enduring achievements of these histories is that they codify an image of the Yarlung period as Tibet's "golden age." The historical events of ancient Tibet are reimagined and reconfigured in these narratives, transformed into topoi that are meant to inspire Tibetan readers and help them identify with that past. The central players of this period are made to conform to a type, with righteous kings and religious teachers serving as exemplars. Thus imperial Tibet and its antecedents are important for both Buddhist and Bon historians because this time period

represents the birth of Tibetan civilization, and it offers many models (*dpe*) suitable for emulation. The renowned Buddhist stories of Srong btsan sgam po and Khri srong lde btsan, for example, constitute the foundational political myth used to unify Tibetan Buddhist culture. Less well known is how the Bonpos evaluate these Buddhist "Dharma Kings" (*chos rgyal*), and what alternative kings and religious heroes they champion. While the cast of characters certainly changes in Bon histories, the plot remains essentially the same in their retelling of Tibet's golden age and dark age.

In rehearsing the story of Tibet's early kings and the enlightened heroes, who introduced religion and are adulated for their contribution to the advancement of Tibetan civilization, the authors of *bon/chos 'byung* may draw upon material from genuinely archaic sources. Some of these texts might originate from the imperial period, like the *Annals* and the *Chronicle*. Nonetheless, there is no confusing the earliest official forms of Tibetan historiography with the *bon/chos 'byung* written after the eleventh century. Not only are the figures and events of the Yarlung period recast as dramas of religious conversion and persecution; but the later texts also display an entirely new style of history writing filled with Buddhist doctrines and rhetoric, frequently expressed in a flowery fashion. Garlands, rosaries, necklaces, and mirrors often adorn their titles.

These newly styled histories first appear in the twelfth century, most notably in the work by Nyrang ral Nyi ma 'od zer, *The Honey Nectar of Flowers: A History of Buddhism* (*Chos 'byung me tog snying po'i sbrang rtsi'i bcud*) and Bsod nams rtse mo's history *The Door Leading Into Buddhism* (*Chos la 'jug pa'i sgo*).[54] The motivating force behind these works was undoubtedly a desire to legitimize the doctrinal cycles, practices, and lineage holders belonging to the author's own "sect" (*lugs*). As these sects began to vie with each other for power, patronage, and prestige after the eleventh century, the number of religious histories written proliferated, as authors sought to gain legitimacy and wrest moral authority away from competing lineages or sects. The rapid proliferation of narrative histories from the twelfth century onwards reveals the intensely competitive

and diverse religious climate in Tibet, as religious figures sought to promote loyalty to their own specific lineage, monastic institution, and power base.[55] Simply put, there would have been little need for Bon apologists to write a *bon bstan 'byung* had there not been any *chos 'byung* written by their Buddhist rivals, and vice-versa. The need for their historical narratives arose once there were two possible ways to tell a story about their origins.

The texts classified as *bon/chos 'byung* are not clearly defined as a distinct "genre" of historical literature in Tibet.[56] Quite often they are synthetic texts, incorporating other types of literature related to religious history, including hagiographies (*rnam thar*), lama lineages (*bla ma'i rgyud*), clan lineages and genealogies (*gdung rabs, mes rabs*), or the lineages of royal dynasties (*rgyal rabs*), abbots (*gdan rabs*) and incarnations (*'khrungs rabs*). The composite character of *bon/chos 'byung* makes it difficult to isolate any unique feature not found in these other types of writing about the past. It is not always possible, for instance, to differentiate precisely between a *chos 'byung* and a *rgyal rabs* or a *lo rgyus*. There are texts identified as *chos 'byung* that are indistinguishable in their narrative features from others designated as *rgyal rabs* or as *lo rgyus*. Or a single text might be designated by two or even all three "genres." One famous example is the model history by Bsod nams rgyal mtshan, a work that is both a history of Buddhism and a genealogy of Tibet's early kings. Most often his work is identified by Tibetan historians as *Rgyal rabs gsal ba'i me long* (*A Clear Mirror of the Royal Genealogy*). However, in its colophon other titles are mentioned: *Chos 'byung gsal ba'i me long* (*A Clear Mirror on the Origins of Buddhism*) as well as the joint title *Rgyal rabs chos 'byung gsal ba'i me long*. To confuse matters even further, in his preface the author refers to his work as a *chos 'byung gi lo rgyus* (*A Narrative about the Origin of Buddhism*).[57]

The authors of *bon/chos 'byung* never claim to have composed an "original" work of history based solely on sources that are otherwise seldom used. Instead, they

might advertise in their titles or in their closing colophons that their composition is "properly compiled" (*legs par bsgrigs pa*) or a "treasury of elegant sayings" (*legs bshad mdzod*), where it goes without saying that reiterating the traditional accounts of their predecessors is deemed "proper" and "elegant" (*legs*). We must take them at their word that these histories are careful compilations rather than revisionist works or radical reconstructions of the past. After reading through a number of Buddhist and Bon histories one begins to realize how often they are a pastiche, a patching together of passages and quotes from authoritative sources to form a "new" work. One might find some *bon/chos 'byung* to be entirely derivative works that tell the "same old stories," but often they are better characterized as synthetic compositions reworked by the author into a new unity, one that is coordinated by a continuous narrative with an architectonic structure.

Western scholars have been quick to label the Tibetan historians' penchant for pastiche in derogatory terms, as a mechanical "scissors-and-paste" approach to the past,[58] or worse, as plagiarists who lift entire passages from unnamed sources so irresponsibly that they often garble the original. In his monumental study of Tibetan historiography, Per Sorenson reproaches Tibetan historians for their rampant plagiarism:

> A mere perusal of Tibetan historiographical writings shall even induce us to risk passing the verdict that neither originality nor scriptural or literary novelty highlight this genre of Tibetan literature. The cases of plagiarism with page-long quotations, most often uncritically and haphazardly rephrased, are well-nigh legion. Nor is a critical attitude a dominant feature among Tibetan monk-historians.[59]

Sorenson's dismissive evaluation might hold true if we were to judge medieval Tibetan historians by our own modern standards of historiography, hold them to our ethic of citation, and measure their works by our own canons of truth and historicity. But rather than risk being uncritical of our own assumptions about historicity, truth, and authority, we need to consider why Tibetan religious historians do not use footnotes or present "original research." Why do they so often repeat what earlier authorities have written, and condemn change or innovation (*sgyur*) of any kind?

It is tempting to answer this question by reciting the cliché that Tibetan religious thinking is deeply conservative in its orientation towards the past. Or as one western writer once wryly noted: "A thing is so in Tibet because it has always been so.... Progress is a form of heresy."[60] While there is no denying this truism, simply identifying these religious attitudes as "conservative" or "traditionalist" may blind us to the ways in which their traditions are invented, and how novelty emerges in representations of the past. Repetition can easily numb the reader into critical somnolence. If we remain alert to the subtle changes that appear in individual works, they may offer us some clue about the historian's present situation. Moreover, in the Tibetan historian's ritualized repetition of past events, we may see that "reality wears a face of such regularity, order, and coherence that it leaves no room for human agency, presenting an aspect of such wholeness and completeness that it intimidates rather than invites imaginative identification."[61] Even the historian's own agency, his creativity and his critical skills may seem utterly illusory; but this illusion may only be the effect of the writer's claim that the religious content of what he records maintains an unchanging identity over time, a claim that requires interrogation. Perhaps we ought to pause and consider anew how the Tibetans' commitment to tradition and their use of historical sources differ from our own.

One of the tenets of modern historiography is that history is built up from individual sources, each one located chronologically and weighed for its value in its corroboration of other sources. Positivists in particular subscribe to a model of "progress" in historical understanding, which results when numerous sources are collected and pieced together, like individual parts in the jigsaw puzzle of the past. Implicit in this positivist ideal is that historical understanding, if not history itself, has a telos: the historian would gain complete vision of the past once enough relevant sources are fitted together. The past is never wholly recoverable of course, so historians must remain satisfied with fragmentary glimpses. Nonetheless, the ideal of holistic vision continues to motivate many historians in their meticulous piecemeal reconstruction of the past.

However imaginary and elusive this goal must be, my intent here is not to criticize the ideals of positivist historians or of Tibetologists who hope one day to "fill in the blank spaces" in our knowledge of ancient Tibetan culture.[62] My point here is concerned less with the goal than the premise of research, where individual "primary sources" are regarded as the building blocks of history. Sometimes a new source might even place into question the entire edifice built up by historians. Nothing excites the revisionist historian more than the discovery of a controversial new document that undermines prevailing conceptions of the past and points toward the need for a new explanatory model. Such discoveries are in fact rare, and most historians are content with pursuing primary source-based research and contributing something "new to the field."

Whereas modern historians value "originality," and often advance the claim that their research undermines received traditions and interpretations, Tibetan historians are motivated by an entirely different set of ideals. They subscribe to values shared by the historians of classical Greece and Rome, for whom Paul Veyne argues "historical truth was a vulgate authenticated by consensus over the ages."[63] The writers of *bon/chos 'byung*, like the Greek and Roman historians of antiquity, saw themselves as fulfilling tradition in their historiography. Their task was to reproduce what the predecessors of their tradition had written, for the fact that it had been authorized by consensus meant that this history was true. This is not to deny Tibetan historians any critical or creative thought, for their contribution lies in correcting whatever historical details seem wrong or suspect to them, or in filling in the gaps of what had been written, and completing what was left out. From this perspective "history is born of tradition, not built up from source materials."[64] Had a medieval Tibetan historian come across a text such as the *Chronicle*, it would have had no more value for its archaic provenance than later histories, nor would it be regarded as a valuable "primary source." The distinction between "primary" and "secondary" sources is altogether foreign to the Tibetan historian. It surely would have been accepted as an accurate royal genealogy, because other historians had long

confirmed its figures and its lineage. The *Chronicle*'s silence about religion during the reign of Srong btsan sgam po would hardly present an obstacle or be considered negative evidence that undermined the king's Buddhist commitment in any way. It would not present an obstacle for the simple reason that there were so many other histories that had already filled in these silences in glorious and compelling detail. The king's role as Buddhist patron and his "secret" identity as Avalokiteśvara (*Spyan ras gzigs*) were already authorized by oral and written tradition.

The Tibetan historian never dreams of rejecting his own received tradition, or of rebuilding it out of the fragments of ancient inscriptions or documents, as modern scholars might. Rather, his purpose is to transcribe the authorized tradition and perhaps improve upon it, fill it out, or remove any unlikely details. Tāranātha, for example, writes in his well-known *History of Indian Buddhism* (*Rgya gar chos 'byung*) that his fellow Tibetan historians have made numerous errors in their chronicles of Buddhism in India, and these will be corrected:

> Even the learned (Tibetan) chroniclers and historians, when they come to discuss India, exhibit with their best efforts merely their poverty, like petty traders exhibiting their meager stock. Some of the scholars, while trying to describe the origin of Buddhism, are found to commit many a mistake. For the benefit of others, therefore, I am preparing this brief work with the mistakes eliminated.[65]

Here Tāranātha explicitly identifies his purpose to be that of correcting mistakes and transcribing the *real* history of Indian Buddhism.

When it comes to the histories written by the "others" (*gzhan sde*), however, they can be rejected out of hand—and they often were. When a Buddhist apologist reads a Bon history, for example, he could easily dismiss the narrative and its message since it would carry no authority for him. He may decide that many of the Bon stories require rectification: the motives assigned to the Bon heroes and Buddhist antagonists would be declared spurious, and their real moral meaning divulged. For the author of *chos 'byung* the problem with Bon histories lies not so much in their details as in the moral authority

claimed by the Bon author, who can only be a liar. Hence the prevalence of *ad hominem* critiques in *bon/chos 'byung*, directed occasionally at other historians but more often at the founders and propagators of the religion, the purveyors of tradition. Buddhist polemicists dismissed much of what constitutes Bon doctrine and practice as simple imitation or plagiarism (*bsgyur*), the dressing up of Buddhist themes in Bon iconic garb. In return, Bonpos accuse their rivals of being the imitators, since their own tradition claims to have historical precedence. Polemicists from both traditions might acknowledge some of their similarities in part, but they usually claimed that their opponent's tradition was derivative, that the "others" accepted an illegitimate and garbled version of their own original and pure tradition. "As in all matters of orthodoxy, so too in questions of authority or tradition: it is all or nothing."[66] Here their point of contention centers on the past, and more specifically the origins, as the distant object of their struggle. Origins exert a seductive pull on the Tibetan imagination, for they are authoritative as a pure presence, an essential self-same identity, and a state of pure potentiality. Buddhist and Bonpo polemicists often vied to capture the origins of highly valorized cultural phenomena—such as the first Tibetan kings, the first Tibetan monasteries, or the first Tibetan literature—always in an attempt to harness the power of these *ur*-events by directing it in the predictable trajectory down the path of their own cumulative tradition into the present. Once the origin is owned, it becomes central to the tradition's collective identity, the nucleus around which authority and identity crystallize.

That acknowledged, it must be pointed out that no Buddhist historian ever questioned that Bon existed in Tibet prior to the arrival of Buddhism. The Bonpos' claim to be the ancient tradition of Tibet, anterior to Buddhism, was supported by a creative etymology. Many Bon texts play upon the similarities between *Bon* and *Bod*, the latter being the word for Tibet. According to Bonpo historians, the Bon doctrine revealed by their "founder" Gshen rab existed prior to the name for the region of Tibet, but the term *Bon* was corrupted into *Bod*, so that the religion constituted the name of the country.[67] The

questionable religious etymology that is proposed here bespeaks the pervasive need by Bonpos to name their origins in the mute, preliterary past. The origins of their religion and their adopted country of Tibet become inextricably woven into the seamless fabric of their tradition prior to Buddhism. Indeed the Bonpos have been spectacularly successful in promoting their genealogical and etymological fictions to establish themselves as a separate prior tradition. Over the past thirty years though, Tibetologists have begun critically to reconsider the longevity of the Bon "tradition." In unraveling the complex issues surrounding its historical identity, scholars have discovered that the earliest strands of Bon history are cut short and may not extend into the pre-Buddhist past. Moreover, even the recoverable strands of Bon identity are inextricably intertwined with Buddhist ones. This revisionist interpretation of Bon bears repeating here, for it will bring into relief the alternative orientations of Tibetan and western historiography.

Equipped with the tools of philology and source critical methods, western scholars set out to track down "Bon" in ancient epigraphy and in the Dunhuang manuscripts, only to discover that it had a very different meaning than what is later claimed for it by Bonpos. Based upon Dunhuang texts alone, the term *bon* or "invoker" referred to a special class of priests working at the Tibetan royal court, whose practices were referred to as "divine conventions" (*lha chos*).[68] These manuscripts inform us that the early *bon* priests worked as ritual specialists in ceremonies for the benefit of the sacred sovereign. They officiated at enthronement ceremonies and oath-taking rites of fealty to the king, and played an important role during the royal funeral ceremonies. The *bon* priests were not the only members of the sacerdotal class, as the Dunhuang manuscripts also mention the *gshen*, a rival group of diviner-priests whose techniques were denigrated as less orthodox. Both were active in the cult of the royal tombs up until the ninth century, when the Yarlung empire came to an end, at which point the role of the *bon* priest became obsolete. Scholars therefore have concluded that *bon* was not used in the texts from Dunhuang to describe a coherent religious system of doctrines and practices, much less the Tibetan national

religion.[69] Rather, *bon* referred to specific divinatory and funerary rites and their priest practitioners.

Only in the eleventh century and after does the term *bon* come to describe an organized religion, with its own religious founder, canonical literature, doctrine and practices, and monastic institutions. In this context, *bon* comes to be qualified by its followers (*bon po*) as *g.yung drung bon* ("Eternal Bon"), a name used in deliberate opposition to *chos*. Buddhists, on the other hand, label this phase as *bsgyur bon* ("translated" or "plagiarized Bon"), a polemical description meant to denigrate its authenticity. What bothered the Buddhists was that so much of Bon theory and practice had to have been lifted from Buddhist sources and then disguised with Bon names. What else could explain their similarities?

The fundamental issue debated by contemporary Tibetologists is how much continuity there is (if any) between the early *bon* priests and the self-conscious Bon religion that emerges in the eleventh century. Is "Eternal Bon" a systematized version and expansion upon the early practices and beliefs of the priests? Or is "Eternal Bon" an entirely new or syncretic tradition, with little in common with the religious concerns of the *bon* priests? While there is little consensus among scholars about the degree of continuity, most share the opinion that there was no enduring "Eternal Bon" tradition, in direct conflict with the claims advanced by Bonpos.[70] It is now widely accepted that "Bon" acquired a new meaning during the early eleventh century, when its identity was being formulated *vis-à-vis* the emerging Tibetan Buddhist "sects." The development of Bon as a constituted religion parallels the development of the Buddhist sects, and the Bon literature written at this time was thoroughly suffused with Buddhist elements. What distinguished the two traditions most dramatically are their different sources of authority as evidenced in their own historical narratives, *bon bstan 'byung* or *chos 'byung*.

The revisionist perspective on Bon is meant to be controversial, contradicting as it does both traditional Tibetan views and earlier scholarship. It is expected that Tibetologists

cite the individual sources that serve as the basis for their interpretation. Rather than repeat the traditional claims of an established view as Tibetan historians do, which hardly requires that controversial sources be cited, this revisionist scholarship attempts to convince others that the new perspective is more adequate than the alternative provided by tradition. The style of presentation of western historiography is analytical: the strengths of the historian's thesis and the weaknesses of the competing theories are demonstrated through analysis of the relevant epigraphical and textual evidence. This argumentative style also showcases the researcher's ability to think critically and independently, the hallmarks of "original research."

Yet there is a fundamental tension underlying this ideal of "original" research, especially when all that can be considered original is the source material itself. In the name of objectivity, the scholar often disavows having added anything new to his or her primary sources. In doing so, the historian's own creativity and authority as a writer is displaced on to the sources, as if their novelty value "spoke for itself."[71] Here we find a curious convergence of western and Tibetan historiography. What authorizes their historical discourse is always located in the past, whether in tradition or in particular source material, rather than in the writer's imaginative response to the past based upon present concerns.

But there is no denying the point of divergence in western and Tibetan historiographic methods, where history is either built upon traditional consensus or on the evaluation of particular sources. This fundamental difference becomes apparent right at the outset, when the writer inaugurates his work and informs us about his project. Beginnings can tell us a lot about motives and priorities. What we find in the introductions of both modern and Tibetan historical works is a revealing "thesis statement," a statement of purpose. In Tibetan histories this appears in the preface (*klad don*), where the author formally states his "commitment" or "promise to write" (*rtsom par dam bca' ba*). Typically the writer includes some self-deprecating statement about his shortcomings as a

scholar, but this is followed by a promise to tell the truth about the past in accordance with tradition.

Let me illustrate this with a statement of purpose that is filled with the stock phrases and rhetoric found in the prefaces of Tibetan religious histories. The Bonpo historian Spa stan rgyal bzang po confesses at the outset of his *Explanation of the Teachings: Lamp to Illuminate How They Spread and Flourished* (*Bstan pa'i tnam bshad dar rgyas gsal ba'i sgron me*): "It is inappropriate for someone as unintelligent as me to investigate something as profound as the history of exoteric and esoteric Bon." Nevertheless he resolves to help his contemporaries learn a little about the past: "I shall write [this history] in accordance with scriptural tradition, having put aside any (tendency towards) exaggeration or deprecation."[72] Spa stan's admission of his own inadequacies repeats the obligatory gesture of humility found in Tibetan religious literature. Not only does it express his intentions in the modest terms expected from a monk, it also assures his audience that what authorizes his writing is not his own cleverness or creativity, but the texts and adepts of his tradition, whose teachings he piously acknowledges were transmitted to him "by the kindness of my lama." Spa stan's stylized gesture downplays his own knowledge and asks his readers to invest their faith in the lineage. His statement of impartiality is offered then as collateral. His readership is assured that he is not prone to praise and blame, nor capable of lies of commission or omission. Finally, he promises to write about the history of Bon in accordance with scriptural tradition (*lung bzhin*), where even the verb he uses (*bkod*) means, "to compile," "to arrange," or "to put in order" material from the past.

Since religious history is meant to serve a didactic and an inspirational purpose, the author's statement of purpose often expresses both religious and aesthetic goals, namely to edify and entertain the faithful. Bsod nams rgyal mtshan opens his *Clear Mirror of Royal Genealogies* with the standard admission of shortcomings, but follows with an earnest resolve to inspire faith and even entertain: "Although it is beyond my own inferior

capabilities to compile this collection of biographies of Avalokiteśvara and the successive generations of Dharma-Kings, whose infinite qualities defy imagination, I wrote it nevertheless to engender boundless piety and reverence in those faithful persons who wish to know the history of the teachings, and to provide amusement for their ears!"[73] From their declarations of commitment we may infer that Tibetan historians were writing with a broad audience in mind, including not only other monk-scholars but pious laymen as well. This general readership places entirely different demands on the Tibetan historian than the elite readership of most modern scholarship, or the even smaller audience imagined for this dissertation, where entertainment and religious edification is hardly a priority.

Founding Fathers and Lines of Descent

The theme of continuity runs like a common thread through the *bon/chos 'byung*. It is most obvious in the historians' need to affirm an unbroken lineage connecting members of their own sect in Tibet back to the founder of their religion, whether Gshen rab or Śākyamuni. These foreign founding fathers are regarded as the original Authors of our era, the source of the timeless truths that were passed down faithfully by their disciples (their "sons") linked in an uninterrupted line of descent. The authority and historicity of the founder is underscored in these histories where he serves as the absolute beginning point in the chronology, with the date of his death (or his "passing into nirvāṇa") establishing the start of "historical" time. All subsequent events are measured in relation to this date in chronological calculations called *bstan rtsis* (literally "chronology of the teaching"). The calculations follow the traditional twelve-year cycle of animal years, but this had been updated in the religious histories to a sixty-year cycle by the addition of five elements (earth, iron, water, wood, and fire) distributed over the twelve year animal cycle. This sixty-year system (*rabs byung*) was based upon the astronomical calculations found in the *Kālacakra Tantra*. In fact the first cycle is

inaugurated in the year 1027, in commemoration of the year in which the *Kālacakra Tantra* was translated into Tibetan.[74]

The chronological calculations made by Tibetan historians were aimed primarily at determining the date of the founder's death, or rather *mahāparinirvāṇa*, an elusive goal for historians still today. Tibetan Buddhists were no more successful in reaching a consensus than are contemporary Buddhologists. It must be admitted, however, that the Tibetans' use of astrology and their reliance on early eschatological prophecies about the eventual decline of the Dharma would seem "unscientific" to us, even wildly speculative. It is no wonder that the resulting range of dates ascribed by Tibetans to the Buddha's passing away spanned millenia rather than a century or two. As the date assigned to the Buddha's death remained unsettled and controversial (2136 BCE? 834 BCE? 544 BCE?), a number of competing methods of calculation developed. By the mid-fifteenth century there were twelve different trends identified in one Buddhist history.[75] Fortunately, most historians tell us which model they are following, or they tell us how many years had elapsed from the Buddha's nirvāṇa to a well-established event in Tibetan history, which enables us to calculate and synchronize the dates of other events in the historian's era.

Bonpo historians also relied on the *rab byung* system but they had their own timetables for the decline of Bon. The Bon periodization schema was based upon the birth of their founder Gshen rab, which is said to take place on the fifteenth day of the first month of the wood-male-mouse year. According to the *Gzer mig*, the wood-male-mouse year is especially auspicious because it begins a cycle of time.[76] In *A Royal Genealogy of Bon*, Khyung po Blo gros rgyal mtshan affirms that 2500 years passed between Gshen rab's death and Khri srong lde btsan's persecution.[77] From this figure we can deduce that he is working with a timetable of decline that is based on five 500-year cycles. Another timetable is found in the *Dar rgyas gsal sgron*, where Spa stan refers to a model that Bon will endure for a 9,000-year cycle, divided into three distinct periods. The

first three millennia correspond to the Gshen rab's body-taming teaching, next follow three millennia of speech-taming, and finally three millennia of mind-taming, before the teaching will disappear entirely. According to this model, 4,428 years had passed when Khri srong lde btsan persecuted Bon.[78]

In both the Buddhist and Bon timetables of decline and dating methods we can see the influence of Indian Buddhist histories and sūtras, where events are also located in relation to the "nirvāṇa" of the Buddha. The timetable of a 5,000-year period of duration for the Buddha's Dharma, widely accepted by Tibetan Buddhist historians, was first formulated in the fifth century by Buddhaghosa, and it can be found in various Pali chronicles, such as the *Mahāvaṃsa*. Tibetan historians were apparently familiar with this model from the commentary on the three *Prajñāpāramitā* written by Dhaṃṣṭrāsena in the seventh century, not from Buddhaghosa himself or the Pali *vaṃsas*.[79] Nonetheless, the Pali chronicles about the Buddha also present a form of Buddhist historical writing strikingly similar to their Tibetan counterparts. The principle motif underlying the Pali Buddhist *vaṃsa* is that of unbroken continuity, most evident in the succession of master and disciples or in the dynastic sequences that were regarded as relevant to the main purpose of Buddhist history. Even the *vaṃsa* themselves were written as chronicles to be handed down from generation to generation, thereby assuring further continuity. *Vaṃsas* embodied a mnemonic purpose, and their composition was informed by ethical and aesthetic ideals too: they were composed for the "furtherance of teaching (*sāsanavuddhi*), for the creation of faith among listeners," and to "arouse serene joy and emotion."[80] In their missionary zeal and inspirational intent Tibetan historians sought nothing less, as we have seen in the statements of purpose cited earlier. In fact, one could argue that the Tibetans' greater chronological and cultural distance from the Buddha (or from Gshen rab) made their task seem even more urgent.

Apart from the Buddhist *vaṃsa* literature, there are other Indian literary precedents that may well have served as a source of inspiration for the genealogical

structure of *bon/chos 'byung*. The preoccupation with lists of succession (*vaṃsa*) is a pan-Indian phenomena. It appears in such varied contexts as the long lists of teachers found in Vedic texts, the lists of elders (*thera*) belonging to the Buddhist *saṃgha*, the genealogies of descent groups such as the Sūryavaṃsa and the Candravaṃsa, as well as the succession of dynasties that are found in royal dynastic histories (*vaṃsavali*). In the *vaṃsavali* (literally "line of the family"), genealogy serves as the narrative frame of the text, as it provides sequence, relevance, and structure. Indian *vaṃsavali* narrate the origins of powerful ruling families and serve as charters of validation for them, just as Tibetan histories often include a genealogy of the founder, tracing back his divine or human ancestors in order to validate the venerable traditions of Buddhism and Bon. Any of these Indian *vaṃsa* traditions may well have served as models for Tibetan historical narratives.[81]

The construction of a continuous lineage serves a few purposes for Tibetan writers. It invests authority in the enlightened author and displaces it from the historian, who only needs to affirm his full inheritance of the founder's true words. As explained above, this enables the Tibetan historian to claim that he merely transcribes his received tradition, that he serves as no more than a link in the chain of succession—although his work will ensure that the chain will continue with future generations reminded of the founder and his successive disciples. But the lineage also legitimizes the present in a number of ways. A lineage is believed to guarantee that the received body of enlightened teachings is complete, that it is a pure corpus unsullied by the ravages of time that turns ordinary bodies into corpses. This becomes especially important in Tibet since both Buddhists and Bonpos believe that their religion died away in its land of origin. Tibetans alone become the genuine heirs of an unbroken tradition, the "suitable vessels" (*snod ldan*) who preserve Buddhism or Bon in its entirety long after it disappeared in India or Zhang zhung. In this respect lineage offers the Tibetans a privileged sense of their religious identity.

Lineage may also become a source of Tibetan political identity. We see a process of politicization set in motion when Tibet's early kings are assimilated into the lineage as avid defenders of the religious law, on the model of the dharmarāja or cakravartin. *Bon/chos 'byung* never fail to identify numerous royal patrons in Tibet, and their active presence as promoters of tradition serves to advertise the political benefits of the teachings for the maintenance and protection of the Tibetan state.[82] The Tibetan kings singled out for remembrance as cakravartin and coopted into Buddhist lineages are themselves modeled on earlier Indian royal sponsors of Buddhism. The roles played by Ajātaśatru, Aśoka or Kaniṣka in supporting and promoting Buddhism in India serve as exemplary models for Tibetan rulers, and in many *chos 'byung* we see that the early royal patrons of Buddhism fit the general pattern established by Indian predecessors. Once again this function of the lineage is hardly unique to Tibet. The desire to promote a socio-religious order in Tibet based upon a cakravartin model is reminiscent of Buddhist ideology found in non-Tibetan chronicles like the *Mahāvaṃsa*, with its cakravartin inspired images of Sinhalese kings, its record of historical events that proclaim the primacy of the Saṃgha, and its claim that Sri Lanka is predestined for the establishment of Buddhism.[83]

Finally, lineage serves as a source of sectarian pride, especially when the fruit of the "insiders" pure lineage is set apart from the corrupt teachings of the "outsiders" whose pedigree is questionable. As we have seen, Buddhist and Bon writers often engaged in polemical critiques of each other. The others' lineage holders were sometimes dismissed as individuals of impure ancestry, their philosophical views were disparaged as nothing more than popular superstition (*rnam rtog*), or dismissed as mixed up (*'dres ma*) with the heretical beliefs of the Tīrthikas, and their lineages denigrated for being broken or foreshortened, cut off from the venerable past. The scholar-monks who sought to forge long-lasting links in their own lineage also spent considerable time unchaining the lineage links of their opponents.

The general obsession with lineages is well known to anyone who has picked up a Bon or Buddhist history and tried to read it from start to finish without becoming numbed by the endless lists of nondescript teachers and their successors. The historians' desire for up-to-date completeness in filling out their lineage tree often makes their work tedious to read as literature, with too many vaguely sketched characters and hardly any plot. And yet *bon/chos 'byung* do have a plot structure. We can discern a temporal and moral structure that serves as the backdrop against which individual events from Tibetan history are narrated. Invariably, *bon/chos 'byung* begin not with the life-story of their founder culminating in his realization of nirvāṇa, but with a cosmogony, followed by an account of how man evolved (or devolved) from the gods of clear light (*'od gsal lha*).

Cosmic Dramas Emplotted by Karma, Prophecies, and Prayers

One of the most striking features of Tibetan historical narratives is their temporal scope. They begin at the Beginning and tell the story of the world's origin, which sets the stage for the subsequent narration of how men and their institutions came into the world. The narratives open in grand style from a cosmic vantage point to describe the structure of the universe, governed by cycles of time that oscillate between periods of destruction and renovation, between alternating phases of dissolution and manifestation. This story of the world's genesis is borrowed from India, where the evolution of the cosmos had been the subject of Buddhist scholastic commentaries and dealt with comprehensively in works such as the *Abhidharmakośa* and the *Lokaprajñāptiśāstra*.[84] Indian cosmology is characterized by its use of vast aeons to measure time, innumerable aeons (*asaṃkhyeya kalpa*) whose duration is truly mind-boggling. Included in the model of fluctuating kalpas is the corresponding notion that the human life span ranges from 80,000 years down to only ten years depending upon whether a kalpa is at its zenith or nadir. In these abstract temporal systems that serve as the framework for Buddhist historical thought, we can

detect the work of scholastics who sought to bring order and mathematical precision to their models, not unlike the goals of many physicists today. Yet for us moderns, the use of enormous units of time in the cosmology, and especially its total orderliness, only underscores its unreality as a historical framework. Its vast scale and complete coherence stymies our ability to identify on a human level. Moreover, the claim that humans once lived for thousands of years can only indicate that we are in the realm of fiction.[85]

The dominant imagery used to express this cosmic rhythm is the fluctuation between periods of lightness and darkness, marked on a microcosmic level by the recurrent cycle of day and night. We might say that all human actions take place in these narratives on a cosmic stage whose curtain rises and falls with regularity. According to both Buddhist and Bon historians however, it is the collective karma of sentient beings that propels this entire process of cosmic evolution and devolution. Although the collective karma of sentient beings is beginningless, it first appears in the cosmogony narratives as a whirling wind. A "circle of wind" (*rlung gi dkyil 'khor*) blows through the empty sphere of space and stirs up a thick thundercloud, which lets loose a torrential rainstorm and produces the primeval ocean. The wind whips up the ocean to form foam, which congeals into golden earth like the froth of boiled milk. The golden earth then rises to form land and then mountains, at the very center of which rises the great mountain Meru, the central axis of the universe and the abode of gods.

This evolutionary narrative tells us how our world is formed from basic natural elements (wind, water, and earth). But its moral dimension is no less explicit, for the wind's power is compelled by the karma of previous beings. Nothing escapes the winds of karma and the cosmic patterns of dissolution and manifestation: this is the law of Dharma, whether Tibetans understand that law as *bon* or *chos*. Even the Dharma itself is subject to the regular rise and fall (*dar nub*), corresponding to the rising and setting of the sun and moon. It is this moral-temporal structure that becomes the basis for the following plot that runs through every *bon/chos 'byung*. The appearance of enlightened beings in

the world inaugurates a period of conversion to moral righteousness; the period of religious growth is in turn eclipsed by the demonic forces of immorality and ignorance, which usher in a dark, degenerate age; but this is followed by the renewal of the teaching and especially the revitalization of the monastic rules of discipline (*'dul ba*) as it rises like the sun once again.

Tibetan histories of religion often devote an entire chapter to the period of the rise and spreading (*dar*) of the Teaching during the period of the early Tibetan kings, followed by a period of decline (*nub*). Below we will consider the different periodization schemas presented by Buddhist and Bonpo historians, in which periods of history are identified by whether religion spread or declined. These alternating phases occur not only in Tibet's past but in all phases of history everywhere, even in the "pre-historical" period prior to the founder's birth. We learn for example in the *Gzer mig*, a Bon biography of Gshen rab, that prior to the birth of the "founder" there was a period when Eternal Bon was disseminated: "Even in the most distant past the words of the teachers and the Bon teachings, which defy imagination, were spread and flourished (*dar rgyas*)."[86] The first chapter of this work introduces us to Gshen rab's previous incarnation, Gto rgyal ye mkhyen, who set forth Bon teachings and disseminated them among all the gods, leading many to liberation. But not all gods were liberated. In the second chapter we are told that those teachings declined when the compassion of the remaining gods diminished, the lineage of the royal sponsor of Bon died out, and the Bon teachings declined too: "When the universe and the minor kalpa are destroyed, [Bon] also perished as though something lofty was cut down and laid aside."[87] One of the conclusions we might draw from this episode is that an unbroken lineage plays a crucial role in affirming continuity in the face of cosmic dissolution. A lineage effectively flattens out the up and down undulations of time into a single trajectory. It is thought to guarantee the unchanging identity of the teaching, to offer an exception to the law of impermanence. Without lineage as a guarantor of continuity, time would dilute and deny the teachings until nothing would be

left to tell. But religious (and narrative) continuity is ensured in other ways too, with karma, prophecies, aspirational prayers, and emanation bodies all playing key roles in the unfolding moral drama.

In his *Theses on the Philosophy of History*, Walter Benjamin penned a provocative aphorism about how the past seems so powerful in its lurking presence. "As flowers turn toward the sun," he writes, "by dint of a secret heliotropism the past strives to turn toward that sun which is rising in the sky of history."[88] I quote Benjamin here not to pay him homage as a postmodern visionary, but because it seems uncanny to me how medieval Tibetan historians might have anticipated Benjamin's point. For there is a "secret heliotropism" at work too in their *bon/chos 'byung*, where the historian's present is almost always immanent in the past events that he narrates. But the historian overlooks his own narrative presence in manipulating the past, and instead he invokes mysterious past powers that continue to exert influence on present events.

Perhaps the most common temporal metaphor found in the histories is that of germinating seeds (*sa bon*) that flower in the future, a metaphor based upon the doctrine of karma. Promoted by both Buddhists and Bonpos, karma accounts for moral continuity in their *bon/chos 'byung*. Once an individual's karmic seeds are sown they must flower in the future, so that every deed identified as a karmic seed sets up an expectation for the reader. The flowering of karma might be influenced by the power of an enlightened being's past prayer or prediction. Likewise, what assures the faithful reader that the sun of the Teaching will rise once again in the sky of Tibetan history are the magical powers (*dngos grub*, *siddhi*) of enlightened beings. The narratives always feature buddhas, bodhisattvas, siddhas, and saints whose enlightened state enables them to prophesize the future and utter oaths that fashion the future karma of other persons, thereby shaping their destiny. The potency of strongly-made aspirational prayers (*smon lam*, literally "wishing path") to bear fruit in future lives is a well-known theme in Mahāyāna literature. As a genre they have their precedent in stories found in the *avadānas* and *jātakas* of pious

Buddhists who wished that they would be reborn in favorable conditions in order to practice the dharma.

In the context of our Tibetan historical narratives it is affirmed that certain early enlightened siddhas, most notably the Buddhist Padmasambhava and Bonpo Dran pa nam mkha', foresaw and were acutely distressed by the inevitable decline of their religion in the future. They were moved to make aspirational prayers to bring the renewal needed in different periods of decline, to provide the rituals, objects of worship, and scriptural treasures (*gter ma*) that would place those future religious practitioners back in contact with the pristine Teaching, and moreover in a skillful way consonant with the changed circumstances of those later times. Once their past aspirations are realized, the devastating effects of the degenerate period are ameliorated.

Buddhas and bodhisattvas may also effectively close a dark chapter of history and set people on the path to righteousness when they take the form of an emanation body (*sprul sku, nirmāṇakāya*). The very appearance of an emanation body, who is under the impulsion of his own aspirational prayers and bodhisattva vows, is formed too in response to the needs and expectations of those who will come under their influence. The religious purpose of incarnations is clearly connected to proselytism or religious revitalization, as they bring about a literal re-naissance: the more emanations, the more people can be converted, and as converts multiply the teaching is spread quickly. The appearance of large numbers of emanation bodies is often expressed in Tibetan historical narratives by the trope of the Sun of the Teaching reaching its zenith. For Buddhists, Tibet's golden age occurred during the reign of the three Dharma Kings (*chos rgyal*), who were all regarded as *sprul sku*. Srong btsan sgam po, Khri srong lde btsan and Ral pa can were accepted as emanations of Avalokiteśvara, Mañjuśri and Vajrapāṇi respectively.

The explicit identification of Srong btsan sgam po with Avalokiteśvara appears first during the eleventh century with the "discovery" of the *Bka' chems ka khol ma*, and its mythemes were elaborated in the twelfth century *Ma ṇi bka' 'bum* and repeated by all

subsequent Buddhist historians. These early texts not only glorified Srong btsan sgam po but also elevated the cult of Avalokiteśvara by identifying this bodhisattva as Tibet's patron and protector, as the primogenitor of the Tibetan people. The glorification of Srong btsan sgam po as the first Dharma king thus coincides with the development of the cult of Avalokiteśvara as the Tibetans' forefather, whose destined field of conversion is the snow-clad country of Tibet. Much of the *Clear Mirror of Royal Genealogies* is devoted to linking the destinies of Avalokiteśvara and Srong bstan sgam po, and the narrative culminates in Srong btsan sgam po's final apotheosis, when he is absorbed into the heart of a statue of the bodhisattva. This dramatic act serves as narrative "proof" of Srong btsan's secret identity, but it also contains an explanation of how Buddhism will subsequently be spread in Tibet as part of the king's "last testament" (*bka' chems*).

Srong btsan sgam po's last testament is presented as a prophecy that foretells how Buddhism will flourish in the future:

> In five generations hence, a king will appear with *khri* and *lde* [in his name]. At that time many pundits will come from India to translate all (the texts) of the excellent Dharma and categorize (them) properly. Many temples will be built, and the Buddha's teaching will be spread and flourish. The ordained monks will be fully decorated with the three disciplines, and many people will wear yellow robes. [These monks] will serve as the court chaplains for my future grandsons, and the court will support their livelihood, so that everything beneficial and good will occur.[89]

Minister Mgar is said to have immediately inscribed the king's words on a copper tablet and hid it in a treasure chest at 'Phying phu. The royal testament of Srong btsan sgam po functions much like the prophecies uttered by the concealers of "treasure texts" (*gter ma*), and indeed his words are treated as treasures worthy of future revelation. For devout Tibetans the king's last testament is no prediction, for it actually determines the future: owing to the power of the king's words of truth, whose enlightened authority is no less than that of Avalokiteśvara, the Tibetan king must become a patron of Buddhism. Here

we see a binding contract established between a present and a future Dharma king some five royal generations hereafter.

Although there are no Tibetan kings identified as *sprul sku* in Bon histories,[90] many Bon saints and scholars are regarded as emanations of enlightened beings, and there are still others who are said to have lived life-spans of preternatural length. These scholar-saints, the knowledge bearers (*vidyadhāra*) and purveyors of "Everlasting Bon," kept the religion alive through the darkest periods of its persecution. Of the many astounding feats ascribed to Bon scholars and saints, one is especially notable for its importance in Bon historical narratives. It features Mu zi gsal bzang, an early monk who must certainly be regarded by Bonpos as the most important Bon Vinaya lineage holder. After he received full monastic ordination, Mu zi is said to have gained special powers over death as a yogin. When he realized that Bon faced terrible persecution at the hands of the Tibetan king, and that the Bon monastic tradition would be abolished temporarily in central Tibet, Mu zi is said to have gone to a cave in Amdo and meditated on the cessation of the senses (*'gog pa*), only to pass into a deep trance. Just before passing into trance his last words expressed his desire "to sow the seeds of the teaching."

Unlike the last testament delivered by Srong btsan sgam po, Mu zi gsal bzang's utterance seems at first baffling, since he can hardly disseminate the teaching and ordain anyone with Vinaya vows while in trance, which suspends all activity whatsoever in a kind of deep freeze state. It is only much later in Bon narratives, after several centuries have past, that we return to the cave in Amdo and learn how Mu zi slowly emerged from his trance, the length of which is calculated by Bon historians to have lasted anywhere between 228 and 1,800 years![91] A boy came upon the remote cave and wandered inside, intrigued by how it seemed mysteriously lit from within. Inside he discovered what looked like a monk absorbed in meditative trance, except that his hair had grown down to the ground in coils. Just the sight of this yogin-monk filled the boy with faith and joy, and he entreated him to emerge from his trance. The yogin said nothing, and budged not a bit.

The boy returned to the cave on successive days to make the same plea, and the yogin obliged at first by moving only an eyebrow, and on the following day his face cracked slightly, and then he finally arose from his trance to scold the boy: "Alas! Whoever interrupts me, are you human or non-human? What caused you to do this?" The boy promptly asked him for ordination, and the yogin, who was none other than Mu zi gsal bzang, agreed to transmit to him the seed of the doctrine (*bstan pa'i sa bon*). In recognizing the boy as a disciple Mu zi adds charitably, "I will not consider you a hindrance (*gegs*)."[92]

The story of Mu zi gsal bzang and his prolonged trance state is told in most Bon histories, as it accounts for how the Bon Vinaya lineage remained unbroken during the dark ages despite the destruction of monastic life in Tibet. Far from being a "hindrance" then, Mu zi's persistent disciple becomes the first link in a long series of Bon Vinaya masters who are classified as part of the "later spread" of Bon. Mu zi's achievement was to bridge the "golden age" of the Yarlung period with the subsequent dissemination of Bon in Tibet that begins during the eleventh century. The intervening dark period, when the sun of the teaching is said to have set in Central Tibet, posed the threat that monastic life might be totally extinguished. Mu zi gsal bzang emerges as a hero who nourished and sustained the seed of the teachings in the border regions of Tibet, only to pass it on to a "suitable vessel," a disciple with whom he had "ripe" karmic connections.

Srong btsan sgam po's "last testament" and Mu zi gsal bzang's last words before entering his prolonged trance echo each other: both express a concern for continuity and both manifest control over causality and impermanence. Other Buddhist and Bon narratives often identify explicitly the karmic links (*las 'brel*) and causal connections (*rgyu 'brel ba*) between past, present and future, as well as differentiating between the primary cause (*rgyu*) and the secondary conditions (*rkyen*) that determine the outcome of key events. In doctrinal terms, the theory of karma and *pratityasamutpāda* are invoked to interconnect the events that are woven into the narrative. The rhetoric of karmic

connections and "a fitting interdependent origination" (*rten 'brel khrigs pa*) is used to explain the confluence of destiny and the auspicious timing of crucial events. There are no accidents and few surprises in these narratives, for the Tibetan historians relate their stories in an ordered and systematic fashion, ruled more by the logic of karma and causal connections than by auspicious coincidence or happenstance.

Systematizing the Past: the Periodization of Historical Narratives

In line with this very Buddhist preoccupation with causality, Tibetan historians display their own genius for systematic organization, with each new topic outlined carefully in an unfolding "table of contents." Their reliance on structural analysis and topical outlines (*sa bcad*), a feature that underscores the work's architectonic structure, is characteristic not only of these religious histories but of Tibetan scholastic literature in general, and it is one of the trademarks of Tibetan commentarial tradition. It is here that the Tibetan compiler of history or the author of scholastic commentary often demonstrates considerable ingenuity. The narratives in *bon/chos 'byung* unfold through this standardized structure, with each new topic and subtopic carefully introduced and enumerated. This somewhat laborious structuring device might be regarded as a crucial part of the process of "disciplining" the past, or "taming" (*'dul ba*) the wild profusion of existing legends, oral traditions, histories, and scriptural sources about a given topic. The use of this scholastic format gives the impression of the work's neat coherence, its completeness and closure, and it tends to distract the reader's attention from the essentially composite character of the work. As a literary device however, the penchant for outlining each topic numerically might be judged as artificial. The narrative flow suffers when the author repeatedly draws the reader's attention to the mechanical structure of the causal story sequence.

Less intrusive in the narrative and more central to the plot are the periodization schemas adopted by the authors of *bon/chos 'byung*. The writers distinguish the phases of Tibetan history in terms of the dissemination of the Teachings. These phases reiterate the basic cosmic riff of alternating periods of "darkness" and "light." For Buddhist historians Tibetan history is typically divided into two stages for the spread of the Dharma, the "early dissemination" (*snga dar*) under the Dharma kings up to the reign of the apostate king Glang dar ma, and the "later dissemination" (*phyi dar*) beginning in the eleventh century or so. While the early/late dissemination model is by far the most common periodization schema, there was another attempt by post-Dynastic historians to classify in greater detail the general introduction of Buddhism into Tibet. In this model, the introduction (*dbu brnyes*) of the Dharma to Tibet is ascribed to king Lha Tho tho ri snyan tshal five generations prior to Srong btsan sgam po, when Buddhist texts like the *Karaṇḍavyūha Sūtra* miraculously floated down from the heavens. Since these texts were written in an unknown foreign language, they were never studied or properly understood until the time of Srong btsan sgam po, who is credited with "anchoring" or "tethering" (*srol btod pa*) the Dharma, and establishing it on a firm footing in Tibet. The final phase involves the "full mastery" (*srol 'dzin pa*) of Buddhism, a phase generally attributed to Khri srong lde btsan. The metaphors used here present the introduction of Buddhism as a gradual process of domestication. Below we will consider the Buddhist *mission civilisatrice* in more detail, with its rhetoric of "taming" and "civilizing" the barbarian Tibetans into good Buddhists.

Bon historians, on the other hand, employ a tripartite scheme for the diffusion of Bon, separated by two dark periods of religious suppression. The early dissemination (*snga dar*) occurs during the reigns of the first seven Tibetan kings but ends with Gri gum who, threatened by the power of the Bonpo priests, abolishes Bon. The intermediate phase of diffusion (*bar dar*) begins with Gri gum's successor who reinstitutes Bon; it flourishes until the reign of Khri srong lde btsan, who horribly persecutes Bon once again

and forces its literature to go underground. The later spread (*phyi dar*) of Bon roughly coincides with the Buddhist renaissance of the eleventh century, when Bon treasure seekers discover the hidden texts in profusion.

The periods in Tibetan history when Buddhism or Bon declined, for example, may be explained as the global effect of various cumulative causes. In cosmological terms, the decline may be seen as an effect of the kalpa of destruction; in the social realm, it is the fruit of the collective negative karma of the Tibetan people, whose merit had decreased so significantly that they had become "unsuitable vessels" (*snod ngan*) for religion. Another social explanation for why religion begins to decline is that the human life span was growing shorter in the kalpa of degeneration. For example, in his *Royal Genealogy of Bon* Khyung po Blo gro rgyal mtshan notes that Bon declined under Khri srong at a time when the human life span was only fifty years.[93] But the decline of Bon is also explained in terms of the specific historical agents (e.g. Khri srong lde btsan) who played an instrumental role in causing the religion to be persecuted. While this last form of explanation might seem the most "historical" to us, we will see that the agents correspond less to "real" figures than to disembodied and dehistoricized topoi. Khri srong lde btsan, for example, is consistently represented by Bon historians as irrational due to being "possessed by demons," as Buddhists likewise accuse Glang dar ma.

Another crucial feature of many *bon/chos 'byung* is that they are meant to serve as encyclopedic sources that contain not only historical narratives, but also an organized classification of texts (*gtan la phab*) as well as the lineage of each textual cycle. One of the functions of encyclopedic works such as Spa stan's *Dar rgyas gsal sgron* or Bu ston's *Chos 'byung* is to identify all of these important texts, list their lineage, and celebrate their role in the "civilizing project" of Tibet. It is not surprising that Tibetan polymaths with a penchant for systematization like Spa stan and Bu ston played a crucial role in the canonization of their own tradition. Bu ston's *Chos 'byung*, to cite the most well known example, is intimately intertwined with his ambitious project of codifying the Tibetan

Buddhist canon into the Sūtra (*Bka' 'gyur*) and Śāstra (*Bstan 'gyur*) collections, for which he is most famous. It can be divided into three sections: 1) a general review of Indian Buddhist Sūtra and Śāstra literature, and its key terms; 2) the history of Buddhism in India and Tibet; and 3) a catalogue of all the canonical works, their authors and translators. Thus the actual historical narrative is sandwiched between two descriptions (or rather prescriptions) of Buddhist canonical literature that is catalogued in detail. So authoritative and systematically organized was Bu ston's *Chos 'byung* that it came to serve as the preface and table of contents for the Snar thang edition of the Tibetan canon. Bu ston's mastery of this enormous literature and his authority as the redactor of the Tibetan canon lends authenticity to his historical narrative. True to his interest in formulating canonical lists, in each biography Bu ston catalogues the texts which they composed, lending legitimacy to the stories he tells of each figure. Bu ston's genius for systematization gives the text the crucial canonical characteristics of coherence, completeness, and closure.

Bu ston's editorial activity and participation in the formation of the Tibetan Buddhist canon had an impact on the Bon scholars of the day too, who also set out to systematize their own definitive edition of sacred texts. However, the criteria used by the Bon scholars for determining what was normative included more than "proof" of a text's Indian pedigree, for their collections included many textual revelations (*gter ma*) as well as teachings that had been transmitted orally. The formation of the Bon canon may have begun in the latter half of the fourteenth century, although the participants in this project remain obscure. Although the Bon *Bka' 'gyur* contains no text dating later than the fourteenth century, Per Kvaerne has tentatively suggested the mid-fifteenth century as the time when the Bon canonical collections were finally "closed."[94] He offers this late date largely on the grounds that this allows plenty of time for the Bonpos to create their own canon on the model of the Buddhist canonical collections. While there is no denying the structural similarities between the Buddhist and Bon canons, it seems more likely that the

Bonpos who first organized their canon were actively participating with the Buddhists in what Paul Harrison calls the "Bka' 'gyur craze," rather than simply imitating the Buddhist model at a much later date.[95] Kvaerne's allowance of over a century-long lag before the Bon canon was formed assumes that the Bonpos were only mindlessly mimicking the Buddhist canonical models. It seems more probable that the Bon scholars were keeping pace with their Buddhist rivals rather than simply aping them a century later. Indeed, I would suggest that the Bonpos' own unique historical perspective and their alternative method of textual transmission served as a challenge to the Buddhists to codify their own texts, and to write their own histories in response.

Stylized Symmetries and Typical Tropes

I will briefly rehearse some of the stylized symmetries that appear in the Buddhist and Bon narratives, paying particular attention to their allegorical character, the play of light and dark forces in the past. Prior to its conversion to the true religion, Tibet is depicted in both *bon/chos 'byung* in stereotypical terms as a dark, dangerous, and demonic place. Native Tibetans are characterized as savage barbarians, with a propensity for violence and an insatiable thirst for bloody sacrifices. Tibet's marginal status is regarded as both geographic and moral, for it is a border region "beyond the pale" (*mtha' khob*), inhabited by outsiders living in an anarchic state of lawlessness. But this barbaric state of affairs is dispelled by the arrival of religion from outside Tibet, which not only brought enlightenment to the land of darkness, but it also introduced a new legal system, morality, literacy, and a higher standard of living. The histories narrate how Tibet was providentially civilized by the great vehicle, which originated in India or Zhang zhung, crossed the high Himalayan threshold, and introduced new spiritual and practical techniques for cultivating the high snowy land of Tibet, sowing not only karmic seeds but introducing actual agricultural techniques too.

A passage from the *Ma ṇi bka' 'bum* illustrates the Buddhist *mission civilisatrice* well. In the selection excerpted here, the dying Śākyamuni addresses his last prophetic words and instructions to Avalokiteśvara:

> The snowy land to the north is presently a domain of animals, so even the word 'human being' does not exist there—it is a vast darkness. And all who die there turn not upwards but, like snow-flakes falling on a lake, drop into the world of evil destinies. At some future time, when that doctrine declines, you, O Bodhisattva, will train them. First...they will be brought together [as disciples] by material goods. After that, bring them together through the doctrine![96]

In this passage we see the image of pre-Buddhist Tibet as entirely subhuman, where beings must suffer rebirth in hellish realms because of their ignorance of karma. The Tibetan "doctrine" during these dark times, though unidentified here, comes to be called Bon by other Buddhists, and the trope of inversion or reversal is assigned to it. Whereas the Dharma leads one upward to a positive rebirth and enlightenment, Bon is always associated with the lower demonic realms and a subhuman rebirth. Avalokiteśvara, in the guise of Srong btsan sgam po, will begin training and disciplining the people in the Land of Snows first by luring them with "material goods" and then teaching Buddhist doctrines. Such pragmatism, in which the Bodhisattva's *upāya* creates a form of upward mobility, is part and parcel of the Buddhist missionary enterprise: to uplift Tibetans from barbarism to civilization, replacing native life in all its aspects with higher Buddhist values, and uniting all under the authority of wise bodhisattva-kings.

In this way the Tibetan barbarians were said to be tamed, converted, and civilized. The word most commonly used by Buddhist and Bon authors to describe this conversion process is *'dul ba*, a term whose semantic field encompasses everything from the power to "subjugate," "convert," and "civilize," as well as referring to the disciplinary teachings themselves, the Bon and Buddhist monastic code (*Vinaya*).[97] According to these historical narratives, the power of religion in Tibet depends most directly on whether these disciplinary texts and moral codes are being practiced. When the Tibetans

first come into contact with *'dul ba*, the result is not merely a spiritual conversion, but a dramatic cultural revolution, impacting everything from law and politics, morality and native intelligence. All of these things were of a piece, resulting in the complete reformation of Tibet from a backward and barbaric place to a civilized and disciplined nation, nearly an idyllic Pure Land.

It is during this golden age, corresponding to the reign of the three Dharma Kings for the Buddhists, and to the reign of all the early Tibetan kings up to Khri srong lde btsan (excepting Gri gum) for the Bonpos, that Tibet reached a state of harmony in religion and politics. Bon and Buddhist historians evoke the perfect cooperation of religion and politics with the image of the "golden yoke" of royal law and the "silk knot" of religious law being around the necks of the Tibetans, controlling their actions in the religio-political field.[98] The "golden yoke" and "silk knot" are not regarded as repressive images at all, but rather as enlightened forms of restraint. When the golden yoke and silk knot are in place, the Tibetan kingdom thrives under royal rule that is just, the priests and monks serve as exemplars of moral righteousness, and Tibetan subjects practice their religion faithfully.

This harmony between the religious and political spheres is proclaimed in stock phrases that appear in Buddhist and Bon texts. Here is an oft-quoted Bon example:

> At that time, the Tibetan kingdom was the land of Bon; the kings were great, the priests were dignified, laws were strict, and the subjects were happy. In Zhang zhung and Tibet as kings were gods, human beings were well protected. As the priests served as royal body guards, the kings were able to live long. As they lived mainly in virtue, they were happy in all their rebirths. As the divine rope hung from heaven, the ladder for ascending [to the heavens] was solid. As they invoked undefiled gods, they received protection from them. As the ministers were wise in their counsel, the government was stable: the activities of the unified religio-political system spread and flourished.[99]

This passage expresses the special relationship between *Bod* (Tibet) and *Bon*, the cooperation between the king and his Bonpo priest-bodyguards, and the reciprocal

relationship between the divine protectors and the Tibetan people. The divine rope and ladder (*dmu thag, dmu skad*), used by the Tibetan kings to ascend to the realm of their divine ancestors, appear as symbols of concord and continuity between the celestial and the earthly, tangible evidence of the king's virtue. The Bon texts add that in exchange for the training in morality he received from his priests, the king granted the priests special privileges for their body, speech, and mind, including silk garments, the right to speak their mind, and tax exemption.

Unfortunately, this idyllic state of affairs is reported to have come to an abrupt end. A demonic king, urged on by evil ministers who were adversely influenced by the religion of the Others, persecuted the righteous religion by destroying its monastic basis and banishing the true believers from Tibet, thereby reducing the country to darkness and despair once again. For Bonpo historians, there were actually two such evil kings, Gri gum and Khri srong lde btsan. The latter is not only held responsible for abolishing Bon in Tibet, but he is also (mis)credited with assassinating the Zhang zhung king Lig myi rgya and incorporating his territory, a former stronghold of Bon, into Tibet. The assassination of Lig myi rgya and the fall of a Bon polity during the Buddhist regime of Khri srong lde btsan is represented in Bon histories as a dire event. The silk knot of the Bon law is said to have been severed, and the golden yoke of the royal law broken.[100] The histories then list a variety of ominous signs and portents that appeared at this time in Tibet, signaling the onset of the country's decline into a Dark Age. Many of these signs point to the abandonment of the Bon Vinaya; but even more ominous is the mispractice of tantra by Buddhist monks, who were said to have corrupted royal wives and young girls, claiming them to be *sādhana* consorts, and to have eaten human corpses.[101]

Buddhist historians respond in kind, although the decline of Buddhism occurs after the assassination of Ral pa can and during the reign of Glang dar ma. When the evil king Glang dar ma takes the throne, the *chos 'byung* inevitably report that various forms of blight and famine occurred in Tibet, and people and their livestock were smitten by

pestilence. The king, whose mind was possessed by demons and thus unable to think very clearly, used these calamities as a pretext for suppressing Buddhism in the most vile and degrading manner. Under the king's orders, Buddhist monks were made to work as butchers, others were forced to hunt wild animals, precious Buddhist scriptures were burnt, and so on. Again, the decline of Buddhism is thought to occur when the royal laws became unjust and monks abandoned the moral laws of the Vinaya. *The Clear Mirror* puts it quite dramatically:

> The power of the sovereigns diminished thereafter like winter snowmelt. The secular laws based upon the ten virtues disintegrated like a rope of rotten reeds. The merit accrued by the Tibetan people guttered out like a lamp with no oil. The kingdom's benefits and happiness vanished like a rainbow in the sky. Evil deeds raged like swirling tempests, while benevolent thoughts were forgotten like last night's dreams.[102]

More symmetries become apparent when we consider the titles of *bon/chos byung*, some of which are even styled as "mirrors." In addition to *The Clear Mirror of Royal Genealogy*, there is a Bon history by Spa stan called *The Clear Mirror: A Treatise on the Zhang zhung Oral Transmission of Great Completion* (*Rdzogs pa chen po zhang zhung snyan rgyud kyi rnam bsad gsal ba'i me long*). Two other texts might be paired as parallel polemical tracts. Namely Thu'u bkvan Chos kyi nyi ma's Buddhist doxography, *The Crystal Mirror of Doctrinal Systems*, with its anti-Bon polemic,[103] mirrors Rong ston Chos rje's *Bon Chos kyi bstan pa shan dbye*. The latter text's official title is found in its conclusion: "[This text] by Rong ston chos rje Rinpoche is known as *The Mirror Which Clarifies Bon Methods* and more precisely, it presents just a few accounts of how all the Enlightened Teachings of Bon were plagiarized [*bsgyur*] into Buddhism."[104] Thu'u bkvan's *Crystal Mirror* and Rong ston's *Mirror Which Clarifies Bon Methods* are strikingly symmetrical, since both authors accuse the others of plagiarizing the teachings from their own tradition.

What do we see when we look behind these mirrors, other than the author's own conceit that what he records faithfully reflects the past as it really happened? These

mirrors are far from uniform, and to a critical "outsider" like myself it is tempting to compare them to the trick mirrors often seen at amusement parks. When the author describes the past of his own religious tradition, he uses a convex mirror to elongate its venerable past, while the religious history of the "Others" is foreshortened and belittled with a concave mirror. Of course, our Tibetan authors are innocent of their mirrors' grotesque distortions, and they prefer to describe their own looking glass in solemn and judicious terms. A common image appearing in these texts is the "mirror of karma" (*las kyi me long*) that accurately reflects past deeds and foretells anyone's destiny. Another mirror that appears in these texts is the kind used by a diviner to see into the future. Both mirror images suggest a connection between the historian's ability to understand the past and the diviner's gift of foreseeing the future. It may be fruitful to look more closely at these mirrors in order to understand the connections between Tibetan historical narratives and divination.

Although the diviner's vision is directed forward into the future, while the historian gazes back at the past, both look for signs of cause-effect relationships. For both the world is filled with signs (*rtags*), symbols (*brda*), traces (*phyag rjes*), and portents (*ltas*) that must be deciphered in order to grasp the past or foretell the future. These various kinds of signs reveal uncanny resemblance, for they are forms of similitude. Hence the common image of mirrors, the means by which things scattered in time and space can reflect and answer each other. To know the past or the future requires interpreting these signs, to find a way from their visible mark to that which is being said by it. The special skill of the historian or diviner is their ability to identify these marks and express their muted meaning, to make silent signs and signatures speak, to let them tell their story. Meaning is believed to lie immanent in these signs and signatures. Thus *bon/chos 'byung* are meant to be read as a series of signs whose moral meanings are transparent to the historian, who presents them in a narrative ruled less by chronology than by their immanent order of meaning. This form of narration values mirrors, in whose

depths distant things gaze at themselves and reflect their own images back to one another, nearly able to "speak for themselves." We have come a long way from the *Annals*, where disparate events are recorded only in chronological sequence, without any necessary (or even plausible) connection linking them.

Tibetan historians fancy their *bon/chos 'byung* to be not only mirrors, but also necklaces (*mgrin pa'i rgyan*), garlands (*me tog 'phreng pa*), and rosaries (*'phreng ba*). These ornaments, all valued as ritual objects of offering, often appear in the florid titles of their works, or in the final poems of dedication at the conclusion. They signal the authors' intent to make a religious offering with their composition, often a pious gesture to the past honoring those who spread the teaching in Tibet. Their ornamental quality draws our attention to the rhetoric of these works, for they also serve as metaphors for elegant and well-polished literary compositions in Tibet. These ornamental images were borrowed from Indian *alaṃkāraśāstra* texts, which served as in important aesthetic model for Tibetan literature, both belles lettres and religious narratives. When a Tibetan religious history is likened to a necklace for example, the image alludes to the text's literary style, that it decorates the throat of the person who recites it. All three objects are also apt images for a narrative that comes full circle, ending in a finished knot, with each event strung together by the thread of a narrative plot. The individual beads or gems of the past take their value not merely from being many and lustrous, but from being arranged in a causal story sequence: the narrative lends the necklace meaning as well as beauty. It is believed by the Tibetan reciter of the text, who reverently tells the sequence of events like the beads of his rosary, that he will gain faith not only in the past but earn merit for the future. The text can thus be read in anticipation of the hereafter, just as a rosary can be used to determine the future, as a divination tool.

Many modern western historians have read these histories as accurate "mirrors" rather than as rhetorical throat ornaments. We might consider why these works seem realistic, or at least recognizable to us as "history," rather than regarded as allegorical

stories. Both Bon and Buddhist historians do at times exhibit a critical attitude toward sources and a sober concern with their "authenticity." They frequently criticize earlier historians for their inaccurate interpretations. For example, in his *History of Indian Buddhism* Tāranātha writes: "In this land of Tibet, a story irrespective of being true or untrue, if once circulated among the people, [then] nobody will listen to anything else, even though that be a firm truth. However, the truth should be stated here, even at the risk of incurring displeasure."[105] Tāranātha elsewhere criticizes more than the Tibetan shared memories of the past and identifies particular Tibetan historians who have misrepresented the past. However, for him and other Tibetan historians, criticism of their predecessors and their sources seems mostly confined to *ad hoc* objections to particular details; they never raise fundamental questions about the biases and blindness inherent in their own religious tradition.

Another contributing factor involves the Tibetan's penchant for placing events in a geographic context. A great deal of attention is paid to the places in Tibet where events occurred. This makes these religious histories seem "real" by our standards, and the extensive lists of place-names serve the rhetorical purpose of convincing us of their actuality—but perhaps they present us only with the glittering intensity of a summoned-up hallucination. These geographic details, whether real or imaginary, anchor events in a specific time and place. Often topographic details are incorporated as etiological narratives that explain how a place got its peculiar shape and name. But other times geographic information is simply presented in long ritualistic lists, demonstrating that there is a strong value attached to locative specificity. While most of these geographic details add weight to the claims made by the individual traditions, there is one general claim advanced by Bonpos that comes close to claiming their own religion as autochthonous to the region of Tibet. "Some histories proclaim that [even when] there was no region called *Bod* there was a religion known as *Bon*."[106] The etymological

connections between *Bon* and *Bod* proved very convincing to early western scholars of Bon, who understood that Bon was in fact Tibet's indigenous religion.

Narrative Closure and the Sense of an Ending

I could easily multiply examples of the stylized symmetries and the near-mirror images of Buddhist and Bon historical narratives, but it would make this chapter unduly long. Here I must mimic the Tibetan historians and express my fear of prolixity (*tshig mang bas dogs pa*). What enables the Tibetan historian to end his narrative, and how is closure achieved? Closure can only be reached in these religious histories when it becomes clear that the Teaching has once again been re-established on a firm footing in Tibet. The purpose of Buddhist and Bon histories is to describe the people and events that transformed Tibet from a barren waste land into a veritable pure land, a treasure storehouse of the Three Jewels. Much space in these histories is devoted to classifying texts, those translated from Sanskrit, "discovered" as treasures, or written by Tibetans as commentaries, to identifying the scholars, translators, saints, and yogins who increased the number of the Saṃgha, and to the stūpas, temples and monastic institutions built during the last dissemination. The cumulative tradition of Buddhism or Bon thus acquires momentum and density, a weight of meaning in the Land of Snows.

There is a moral teleology to these narratives, pushing us towards the end of the text, where we find a poem or a ritual dedication of merit penned by the author. These poems mark a distinct break from the dense prose that has described the past, and they reiterate the author's purpose in writing the work, which is most often to inspire uplifting faith in the readers. A formal statement of gratitude is often made towards the propagators of the Teaching. Tibet might be celebrated as the telos, the place to which all the different currents of the teaching have found their way, just as all rivers eventually flow into a vast and profound ocean. If there is a ritual dedication of merit, we see a shift

from the past into the future: whatever merit is gained from evoking the past, may it be directed toward the further propagation of the Teaching in Tibet. Here the dense weight of meaning of the past is thrown forward into the future, and the reader is exhorted to practice and propagate the Teaching. Perhaps complete closure cannot ultimately be achieved in these religious narratives until each individual in Tibet realizes enlightenment in the future. Yet the explicit moralism at the end of the narrative signals to us that the story is finished, even if the real work of religion must always remain unfinished.

Hayden White writes the following about narrative closure:

> The historical narrative... reveals to us a world that is putatively "finished," done with, over, and yet not dissolved, not falling apart. In this world, reality wears the mask of meaning, the completeness and fullness of which we can only imagine, never experience. Insofar as historical stories...can be given narrative closure, can be shown to have had a plot all along, they give to reality the odor of the ideal.[107]

"The odor of the ideal" is an apt phrase for evoking the fictive sense of completeness created in a narrative, and especially at its end, when some kind of closure is reached. Nowhere is this odor more apparent than in Tibetan historical narratives. While the author may acknowledge his own limitations and finitude, when he identifies his personal shortcomings and limited understanding—the "odor of the real"—in the opening "promise to write," the author invests authority not in himself but in his enlightened teacher, and in the unbroken lineage to which he belongs. The narrative is both a product of the past and a project for the future. It serves simultaneously as reinforcement for the lineage, stretching back to the transcendent origins of religion (*bon/chos 'byung*), and as an expression of the desire for all sentient beings to realize the truth first revealed and then faithfully transmitted down to the present. Within these Tibetan works, "the odor of the ideal" includes the Buddhist desire for continuity in the face of change and impermanence, so that the events recorded manifest a coherence, integrity, and fullness that proves so elusive to realize in our partial perspectives and transitory experience.

According to White, the reason why we find historical narratives so compelling, and other forms of historiography like the annals and chronicle so wanting, arises from our need for order, wholeness, and closure:

> The notion that sequences of real events possess the formal attributes of the stories we tell about imaginary events could only have its origin in wishes, daydreams and reveries. Does the world really present itself to perception in the form of well-made stories, with central subjects, proper beginnings, middles and ends, and a coherence that permits us to see "the end" in every beginning? Or does it present itself more in the forms that the annals and chronicle suggest, either as mere sequence without beginning or end or as sequences of beginnings that only terminate and never conclude? And does the world, even the social world, ever really come to us as already narrativized, already "speaking itself" from beyond the horizon of our capacity to make scientific sense of it? Or is the fiction of such a world, capable of speaking itself and of displaying itself as a form of a story, necessary for the establishment of that moral authority without which the notion of a specifically social reality would be unthinkable?

It would seem that for White, any religious or social discourse that speaks of the eternal and transcendent in the form of a story, with a beginning, middle and an end, must have its source in "wishes, daydreams, and reveries," that is, in fictional dreamtime rather than in the real waking world. It would be more "realistic," he suggests, to represent past events in the form of annals, as a mere sequence of events that simply terminate. What is troubling about the annalist's record of events, however, is the lack of a frame for interpreting the meaning of events.

The Tibetan religious historians chose to frame their record of the past using the metaphor of a mirror. One question raised in this chapter was how do the representations of the past acquire their mimetic effect for Tibetan readers? What literary and religious devices are used in these works to create an aura of authenticity? To answer these questions it was deemed important to understand how the Tibetan reader approaches this narrative genre of religious literature, for its mimetic effect must reflect their own expectations. The Tibetan reads or listens to these texts to gain religious inspiration and edification, and to be entertained with a good story about the origins of their religion and

its transmission to Tibet. The description of the past relies on a form and structure that is familiar to the Tibetan reader, and this lends it credibility. We have examined the "content" of this narrative form, which has its basis in doctrines shared by Buddhists and Bonpos that account for temporal continuity: the karmic theory of cause and effect, the doctrine of emanation bodies (*sprul sku*), and the prognostic power of prayers and curses. The narrative also unfolds in a regular fashion, reiterating the basic cosmic rhythm of rise and fall, or manifestation and dissolution. What lends even more coherence to the story is the systematic presentation of the events in a topical outline, with each topic carefully announced in advance and then placed properly in anticipation of the conclusion. For the non-Buddhist reader, much of the "content" of the narrative form requires faith in Buddhist doctrines, and the explicit moralizing at the end makes evident that its "truth" is allegorical. Even the presentation of the past in such a regular order, whether it reflects cosmic and temporal "law," or the tailoring of events according to the requirements of a moralistic story pattern, seems suspect to the critical historian of religion. The narratives are fabricated for the purpose of legitimizing ideological interests by presenting Tibet as the genuine heir of an unbroken tradition. The Tibetans serve as the curators who preserve Buddhism or Bon in its entirety, long after it disappeared in the country of its origin.

How is the modern historian of religion to assess the value of these narratives, or use them to reconstruct the past? Once we recognize that the specific events recorded in Buddhist and Bon histories are framed within a fictive "mirror," do these events have any significance outside of that frame? How do we move from "inside" the text to its context "outside?" Can we develop a more "realistic" reading about the past based upon these narratives, one that situates these works in particular social and political contexts? These are important questions to raise, but we must realize that they are *our* questions, generated by what we regard as "real" and "true." The contemporary secular historian finds "truth" in a historical account that links the events described in the Tibetan

historical narrative to those mundane aspects of Tibetan society so neglected in *bon/chos 'byung*, such as the political and economic dynamics of monastic patronage, or the struggles for power, property, and prestige between rivaling sects. The historian's need to identify the situated, interested, and material dimensions of Tibetan religious discourse tends to fracture the illusion of coherence that is the intended effect of the Tibetan historical narrative. The allegorical "clear mirrors" of the Tibetan historians may crack under the scrutiny of the historian, as she supplements or substitutes it with the "real story" that grounds past events in social and political realities. Thus the cracked mirror of the medieval Tibetan historian is replaced with a more modern western mirror, although it is still said to reflect accurately the "reality" of Tibet. Once we realize that the values and the ideological agendas that motivate the medieval Tibetan monk to write a *bon/chos 'byung* and the modern secular historian to write about Tibetan social history are vastly different, the question arises: *Whose* history are we trying to write?

This question will be addressed in the following two chapters, as we consider how the *bon/chos 'byung* have been read and used by modern historians, both Tibetan and European. While it would be extremely valuable to examine the "local production of meaning" in the formation of the medieval *bon/chos 'byung*, in the following chapters we will consider the interplay and interconnections between Tibetan and Orientalist interpretations of Buddhism and Bon. As objects of investigation, "Buddhism" and "Bon" are as much a product of western needs and interests in Tibet as they are the effects of Tibetan religious writing and debate. One need expressed so often today by scholars is the call for self-reflexivity, a call that will be heard and heeded here. When interpreting "Bon" and "Buddhism," we must consider how our own prejudices and those of our predecessors impinge upon the representation of the two religions under examination. This requires adopting an anti-essentialist interpretive strategy that calls into question the common dichotomies (including "insider" versus "outsider") and standard stereotypical formulations of the relationship between the two religions of Tibet.

In the next chapter we will critically interrogate one of the most essentialized "natural" categories used in the history of non-Tibetan scholarship on Bon, namely "shamanism." It is an "othering" term used by western scholars to distinguish Bon from Buddhism, and a critical genealogy of "shamanism" will reveal a variety strategies used by non-native scholars to identify and control the "native" religion of Tibet.

Notes to Chapter I

[1] L. Austine Waddell, in his *Buddhism & Lamaism of Tibet* (London 1895, reprinted in New Delhi: Heritage Publishers, 1979, p. 19 n.1) writes: "The historians so-called of Tibet wrote mostly inflated bombast, almost valueless for historical purposes. As the current accounts of the rise of Buddhism in Tibet are so overloaded with legend, and often inconsistent, I have endeavored to sift out the more positive data from the mass of less trustworthy materials." Vostrikov, in his pioneering study of *Tibetan Historical Literature* (Calcutta: Indian Studies Past and Present, 1970) p. 59, identifies the gravest problem with Tibetan "feudal historiography" is its religious orientation and strong clerical bias. He writes: "This doubtless is the biggest defect of Tibetan historical literature. In describing the past, especially the far remote periods, Tibetan historians cannot always distinguish facts from myths—what is historical from what is legendary—and often mix one with another." Giuseppe Tucci offers a more positive assessment, his own mixed metaphors notwithstanding: "We can accept as well founded the traditional account of Tibetan history. I mean as a whole, in its skeleton, without of course taking into consideration the legends and myths which later on were circulated and grew up concealing, as it were, the authentic kernel of the ancient chronicles." From "The Validity of the Tibetan Historical Tradition," in *India Antiqua* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1947), p. 319. More recently, Roberto Vitali repeats the positivist historian's mantra about the need to separate history from myth: "Typical of Tibetan historical literary tradition, *mNga' ris rgyal rabs* includes straightforward facts together with lengthy digressions into storytelling and eulogies of the most significant figures.... As is the case in every other work, it is crucial to disentangle genuine facts from successive layers of interpretation, interpolated accounts, and more or less arbitrary additions and deviations from the original." *The Kingdoms of Gu.ge Pu.hrang* (Dharamsala, 1996), p. 140. One final example must suffice. It appears in Per Sorenson's bulky study *Tibetan Buddhist Historiography: The Mirror Illuminating the Royal Genealogies* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 1995), p. 24: "Browsing though the narratives of [Srong btsan sgam po's] Vita-s leave us with the indelible impression of a king recast or redressed in an outfit manufactured by his posterity in order to create a mythic figure endued with supernatural endowments as it becomes for an august monarch of national statue....Large parts when not entire accounts are steeped in narrative ornamentations and his person has by posterity always been clothed or shrouded in an abundance of speculation throughout all the strange permutations of his biography. Sifting fact from myths in this literature is a problematic and painstaking enterprise, occasionally a forlorn hope." Sorenson's conclusion comes close to anticipating the words of a modern Tibetan scholar, Samdhong Rinpoche, who wrote in the foreword to *Tāranātha's History of Buddhism in India* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1990), p. xi: "The line of demarcation between history and legend is too thin to observe while writing; the two overlap each other unconsciously and unknowingly. Faith and reason overpower each other throughout one's life, which results in contradiction, but the conflict never ceases in any sphere. As such, it is difficult to say if the author of a book of history is free from the influence of his faith in analyzing the past."

As an alternative to this positivist approach to Tibetan history and myth, see the essay by Alexander Macdonald, whose anthropological approach to Tibetan myths informed what follows in this chapter. "Religion in Tibet at the Time of Srong btsan sgam po: Myth as History," in *Tibetan and Buddhist Studies Commemorating the 200th Anniversary of the Birth of Csomo de Körös*, (Budapest: Akademiae Kiado, 1984), pp. 129-140.

[2] I am especially indebted here to Hayden White's first chapter entitled "The Value of Narrativity in the Representation of Reality," in *The Content of the Form: Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987), pp. 1-25.

[3] These two works (Pelliot tibétain no. 1288 and no. 1287) appear in *Documents de Touen-Houang relatifs à l'histoire du Tibet* (Paris: Librairie Orientaliste Paul Geuthner, 1940) as the *Annales* (with the Tibetan text transcribed on pp. 13-27 and a French translation by J. Bacot on pp. 29-52) and the *Chronique* (Tibetan text pp. 97-122, with a French translation by J. Bacot and Gustave Charles Toussaint on pp. 123-170).

[4] Hayden White, *The Content of the Form*, p. 4 and p. 216 n.8. White refers here to the standard work of Harry Elmer Barnes as representative of the *doxa* of western historiography. See chapter three of Barnes' *A History of Historical Writing* (New York, 1963) and Robert Sholes and Robert Kellogg, *The Nature of Narrative* (Oxford, 1976), pp. 64, 211.

[5] The date of composition ascribed to this text is fairly straightforward, since it ends abruptly in 747 CE, which is presumably the annalists' own yesteryear.

[6] Dge 'dun Chos 'phel (1903-1951) was the first contemporary Tibetan scholar to study this work, and his philological and historical insights were likely an aid for the translation by Jacques Bacot. Dge 'dun Chos 'phel describes the text as a *lo rgyus* in his reproduction of the text *Tun hong nas thon pa'i Bod kyi lo rgyus yig cha*, found in *Dge 'dun chos 'phel gyi gsung rtsom* (Gang can rig mdzod 12. Ed. by Chab spel Tshe brtan phun tshogs. Lhasa: Bod ljongs bod yig dpe rnying dpe skrun khang, 1990), pp. 123-155. For a discussion of the meaning of *lo rgyus*, see Leonard van der Kuijp, "Tibetan Historiography," in *Tibetan Literature: Studies in Genre*, ed. by José Ignacio Cabezón and Roger R. Jackson (Ithaca: Snow Lion Press, 1996), pp. 42-3; and Dan Martin, *Tibetan Histories* (London: Serindia Publications, 1997), pp. 14-15.

[7] Mention is made of the official role of the state record keeper (*yig tsangs pa*) in an ancient Tibetan text from central Asia edited and translated by F. W. Thomas in *Tibetan Literary Texts and Documents Concerning Chinese Turkestan* Part II: Documents (London: Luzac & Company, 1951), p. 418. Scribes (*yi ge pa*) are mentioned as well in Pelliot Tibétain 290 studied by Lalou in "Revendications des fonctionnaires du grand Tibet au viiie siècle" *Journal Asiatique* CCXLIII (1955), pp. 177-8, lines 40, 50.

[8] *Documents de Touen-Houang*, p. 13.1-10.

[9] Géza Uray has suggested that that the time intervals between the earliest events of the *Annals* are only approximations. See his article, "The Narrative of Legislation and Organization of the *Mkhas-pa'i Dga-ston:* The Origins of the Traditions Concerning Srong-brtsan sgam-po as First Legislator and Organizer of Tibet," *Acta Orientalia Hungaricae*, XXVI (1972), p. 33-5 n. 86.

[10] Rolf A. Stein, *Tibetan Civilization* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 1972), p. 54.

[11] White, *The Content of the Form*, p. 9.

[12] See Jacques Bacot, *Introduction à l'histoire du Tibet* (Paris: Societe Asiatique, 1962); V. A. Bogoslovski, *Essai sur l'Histoire du Peuple Tibétain ou la Naissance d'une Société de Classes* (Paris: Librairie C. Klincksieck, 1972); Ariane Macdonald, "Une lecture des Pelliot tibétain 1286, 1287, 1038, 1047 et 1290. Essai sur le formation et l'emploi des mythes politiques dans la religion royale de Srong-bcan sgam-po," in *Etudes tibétaines dédiée à la mémoire de Marcelle Lalou*, ed. by Ariane Macdonald (Paris: A. Maisonneuve, 1971), pp. 190-391; Paul Pelliot, *Histoire ancienne du Tibet* (Paris: 1961); A. Róna-Tas, "Social Terms in the List of Grants of the Tibetan Tun-huang Chronicle," *Acta Orientalia Hungaricae* V, (1955), pp. 249-270; Rolf A. Stein, *Tibetan Civilization* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 1972); Géza Uray, "L'annalistique et la pratique bureaucratique au Tibet ancien," *Journal Asiatique*, CCLXIII 1-2 (1975), pp. 157-170; also see "The Four Horns According to the Royal Annals," *Acta Orientalia Hungaricae*, 10.1 (1960), pp. 31-57; and "A propos du Tibétain *rgod-g-yuṅ*," *Études tibétaines dédiées à la mémoire de Marcelle Lalou* (Paris: Librairie d'Amérique et d'Orient, 1971), pp. 553-556.

[13] Géza Uray, "Four Horns," n. 26.

[14] Hayden White, *The Content of the Form*, p. 6.

[15] The philological arguments over the meaning of *mkhos* have been summarized by Uray in *The Narrative of Legislation*, n.1 and n. 3, pp. 11, 18-20. Also see *Documents de Touen-Houang*, p. 32 n. 6 and p. 37 n. 7; also Vitali, *The Kingdoms of Gu.ge Pu.hrang*, p. 277 n. 421.

[16] Christopher Beckwith notes in *The Tibetan Empire in Central Asia* (Princeton University Press, 1987), p. 51: "It is probable that the Tibetans...had great difficulty in holding on to the new conquests. This was due in part to their inability to keep the same army—made up of independent-minded warriors—mobilized for long without mutinous thought arising among the rank and file."

[17] A. Róna-Tas, "Tally-stick and Divination-dice in the Iconography of Lha-mo," *Acta Orientalia Hungarica*, VI (1956), pp. 163-170; also see Bogoslovski, *Essai sur l'Histoire du Peuple Tibétain*, pp. 138-140.

[18] Géza Uray, "A propos du Tibétain *rgod-g-yuṅ*," pp. 553-556.

[19] See Róna-Tas, "Tally-stick and Divination-dice," p. 169 n.37; also Uray, "Four Horns," n. 26.

[20] In his bibliographical essay at the conclusion of *The Tibetan Empire in Central Asia* Christopher Beckwith acknowledges on p. 249 that the *Annals* "has been the main Tibetan source used in the writing of this book," an extremely valuable source for the correct names of many of the key actors in Tibetan imperial history and their dates.

[21] *Documents de Touen-Houang* p. 20, translation on p. 42.

[22] Hayden White, *The Content of the Form*, p. 20.

[23] My summary of early annals in Chinese historiography is indebted to P. van der Loon, "The Ancient Chinese Chronicles and the Growth of Historical Ideals," in *Historians of China and Japan*, ed. by W.G. Beasley and E.G. Pulleyblank. (London: Oxford University Press, 1961), p. 25.

[24] The passage from the *Shiji* is cited by van der Loon, in "The Ancient Chinese Chronicles," p. 24.

[25] See the article by Etienne Balazs, "L'histoire comme guide de la practique bureaucratique," in *Historians of China and Japan*, ed. by W.G. Beasley and E.G. Pulleyblank (London: Oxford University Press, 1961), pp. 78-94.

[26] Géza Uray, "L'annalastique et la pratique bureaucratique au Tibet ancien," pp. 158-9, 169.

[27]Géza Uray, "The Annals of the *'A-zha* Principality: The Problems of Chronology and Genre of the Stein Document, Tun-huang, Vol. 69, fol. 84" in *Proceedings of the Csoma de Körös Memorial Symposium*, ed. by Louis Ligeti (Budapest: 1978), pp. 541-578.

[28] The editor Jacques Bacot organized his edition of PT 1287 into ten chapters, which was entirely arbitrary and even confusing, for it made it more difficult to unravel the problems in continuity. The text consists of sixteen paragraphs each devoted to a separate subject. For a discussion of the problems raised by Bacot's division of the text into chapters, see Uray's article, "Notes on a Chronological Problem in the *Old Tibetan Chronicle*," *Acta Orientalia Hungarica* (21.3, 1968), p. 299.

[29] Géza Uray, "Notes on a Chronological Problem in the *Old Tibetan Chronicle*," p. 299. Much of Uray's argument requires that a date be ascertained for the defeat of the Zhang zhung king Lig Myi rhya and the annexation of Zhang zhung into Tibet, an event which appears in the *Chronicle* within the context of Khri srong lde btsan's reign. Using the *Annals* and other sources, Uray corrects this as an event under Srong btsan sgam po's

reign, and he identifies Lig Myi rhya with Lig snya shur. This mistaken identification is repeated in every Bon history I have read, but for different reasons, as we shall see. Uray was not, however, the first scholar to note this chronological confusion. Dge 'dun Chos 'phel recognized it and quietly corrected it in his unfinished history of imperial Tibet, *The White Annals* (*Deb ther dkar po*). I will discuss Dge 'dun Chos 'phel's critical historiography in my third chapter.

[30] *Documents de Touen-houang*, p. 100 (Chapter II.1-2 in Bacot's edition): *blon che bgyis pa'i rabs la //*

[31] See the discussion of genealogical historical works by A. I. Vostrikov in his *Tibetan Historical Literature*, pp. 62-66. Also see R. A. Stein's lengthy discussion of "*rabs et composita, "récit" et "genre"* in Appendix II of his article "Du récit au rituel dans les manuscrits Tibétains de Touen-houang," p. 537-545. First Stein surveys the semantic range of *rabs* in classical Tibetan from "succession" to "categorization" or "classification," from "narration" to "transmission of a message." Within the context of Dunhuang material he explores the meaning of *cho rabs*. He concludes that its semantic field encompasses the division into genres or classes, successive events and the accounts or statements that relate them, and finally a literary genre devoted to accounts of origin and to classifications of beings and things.

[32] See Tucci's article, "The Validity of Tibetan Historical Tradition," pp. 309-322. Tucci acknowledges that the Sa skya sources add one of five elements to the animal duodenary cycle of dates, and often the element is wrong, although the animal year is correct: "It therefore appears that the Sa skya pa masters had access to documents akin to the chronicles, fragments of which have been found in Turkestan, and that they or their sources added the first element in the indication of the cycle." (p. 317)

[33] The story of Dri gum/Gri gum is analyzed in my paper "The Ties That Bind: The Religio-Political Manipulation of a Tibetan Royal Genealogical Myth" (Unpublished MA thesis, University of Michigan, 1993).

[34] The text reads: *rje bden ni bkol du dga' / sga bden gyis ni bstad du dga' //* "One loves to serve a true prince, one loves to put on a true saddle!" *Documents de Touen-Houang*, p. 104.5-6.

[35] *Documents de Touen-Houang*, p. 103.17. For a summary and insightful analysis of this third section of the Chronicle, see R. A. Stein, *Tibetan Civilization*, pp.133-136.

[36] V. A. Bogoslovski, *Essai sur l'Histoire du Peuple Tibétain ou la Naissance d'une Société de Classes*, p. 14.

[37] The date for this text in Ariane Macdonald's estimation was that it was compiled in the first half of the ninth century. She arrives at this date by looking at the list of ministers that appears in the second chapter. It ends with the Ministers 'Bro Khri sum rje Stag sgnag and Dba's Rgyal to re stag snya, who appear in the Skar chung inscription, and the

former is also one of the main players in the Treaty of 822/823. But Uray suggests that the *Old Tibetan Chronicle* was compiled after the middle of the ninth century in "Narrative of Legislation," p. 50. Stein suggests 800-840 in "Tibetica Antiqua IV: La tradition relative au début du bouddhisme au Tibet," *Bulletin de l'Ecole française d'Extréme Orient* 75 (1986) p. 185.

[38] Ariane Macdonald reached this conclusion about the multiple genres and the compiler of this Chronicle: "The fact that the paragraphs belong to different genres already indicates the subject of the composition of the ensemble of the Chronicle.... Inversely the absence of relations concerning certain reigns, which are found in the versions of the later literature...confirms the impression that the Chronicle...is an incomplete grouping of elements independent in origin, written by different authors, which have been gathered together or recopied by a compiler at a date which cannot be later than the 9th century." "Une lecture des Pelliot tibétain 1286, 1287, 1038, 1047 et 1290," pp. 334-5.

[39] Hayden White, *The Content of the Form*, p. 13.

[40] White specifies the following characteristics of the chronicle, in his *Content of the Form*, p. 16: "By common consensus among historians of historical writing, the chronicle is a "higher" form of historical conceptualization and represents a mode of historiographical representation superior to the annals form. Its superiority consists in its greater commprehensiveness [sic.], its organization of materials "by topics and reigns," and its greater narrative coherency. The chronicle also has a central subject—the life of an individual, town or region; some great undertaking, such as a war or crusade; or some institution, such as a monarchy, episcopacy, or monastery. The link of the chronicle with the annals is perceived in the perseverance of chronology as the organizing principle of the discourse, and this is what makes the chronicle something less that a fully realized "history." Moreover, the chronicle, like the annals but unlike the history, does not so much conclude as simply terminate."

[41] *Documents de Touen-Houang*, p. 108 (section V.5 in Bacot's edition). For a discussion of the term *chab srid*, see Terry Jay Ellingson's unpublished dissertation, *Mandala of Sound* (University of Wisconsin, Madison, 1979), p. 63. Rolf Stein also analyzes the broad semantic field of *srid* and the particular binome *chab srid* in "Un ensemble sémantique Tibétain: Créer et Procréer, Être et Devenir, Vivre, Nourrir et Guérir," pp. 413-415, and n. 4.

[42] The "river state" and its symbolism of tributaries unifying in a larger body of water is illustrated well by a song preserved in the *Chronicle*. This song is put in the mouth of Gnam ri Srong btsan, the first emperor to unite the Yarlung empire. The Tibetan is found in *Documents de Touen-Houang*, p. 109.23-30. I can hardly improve upon the poetic translation by Terry Ellingson in *Mandala of Sound*, p. 63:

> The Yar mo, this little river / From the valley, flows to the Gtsang [po] /
> The Yar mo, this narrow river / From the south, northward it unfolds /
> Joining, joining, uniting, uniting, / Which is which, no one can say /

> Going, going, together, together / Which joined which, the water shows not/ From now, from this time on, / O you, do not forsake me! / I, I will not forsake you/ I, if I forsook you, / At heaven's borders, would have to set guards! / You, if you forsook me, / To the Ngas po, would have to do homage! //

Christopher Beckwith also notes that it was under Gnam ri slon mtshan that the region of *rtsang bod* was conquered, according to the *Chronicle*. This indicates that up until the time of Gnam ri, the Tibetans did not have the ethnonym Bod (Tibet), for they acquired it by conquest. See *The Tibetan Empire in Central Asia*, p. 8.

[43]Vostrikov and Bogoslovski, two Russian Tibetologists who read Tibetan "feudal historiography" and interpret early Tibetan society from a doctrinaire Marxist perspective. tend to reify these relationships as static and fixed. One contemporary Tibetan historian, the late Dung dkar blo bzang 'phrim las, is even more reductionistic in his Marxist approach. He simplifies all social relationships in ancient Tibet either to master-slave or feudal landlord-serf relations. See *The Merging of Religious and Secular Rule in Tibet*, trans. by Chen Guansheng (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1991), pp. 1-25.

[44] *Documents de Touen-Houang*, p. 113-4, with Bacot's translation on pp. 151-152.

[45] *Documents de Touen-Houang*, p. 118, with Bacot's translation on p. 161. Cp. Stein's translation in *Tibetan Civilization*, p. 53. The term *gtsug lag*, which I have translated as "morals," is the subject of debate between French Tibetologists. See the pioneering article by Ariane Macdonald, "Une lecture des Pelliot tibétain," where she translates *gtsug lag* as "order of the universe" (pp. 353-4), understood as a theory of royal power. This important term she identifies as the name for Tibet's indigenous religion codified by Srong btsan sgam po. Rolf Stein challenged her thesis on philological and historical grounds in his article "Tibetan Antiqua III: A propos du mot *gtsug-lag* et de la religion indigene," in *Bulletin de l'Ecole française d'Extrême Orient* 74 (1985), pp. 89-95. It is worth noting that elsewhere in the *Chronicle* there is mention of writing during the time of Srong btsan, in a song delivered by his sister Sad ma kar. See *Documents de Touen-Houang*, p. 116.5: *btsan po dral gyis bka' 'di zhes stsal to zhes gsol to //*

[46]*Documents de Touen-Houang*, p. 117-118, with Bacot's translation on pp. 160-161.

[47] *Documents de Touen-Houang*, p. 114: *btsan po khri srong lde brtsan gyi ring la / chos bzang srid che ste / rgyal po ni gnam sa gnyis kyi bar yul du brnam shing / 'greng dud gnyis kyi rje dang bdag mdzad pa'i gtsug lag chen po/ myi'i dper rung bar mdzad do' // legs kyi bya dga' ni rangs par byin / nyes kyi chad pa ni dmyigs su phog par mdzad do // 'jangs pa dang dpa' bo'i ri mo bskyed do // ngan pa ma rabs ni chis* [sic. *chos*] *kyis gsos so' //* [....] *sangs rgyas kyi chos bla na myed pa brnyeste mdzad nas / dbus mtha' kun to gtsug lag khang brtsigs te / chos btsugs nas / thams cad kyang snying rje la zugs shing dran bas / skye 'chi las bsgral to / g.yung drung du bton to //* My translation follows Stein's in "Tibetica Antiqua III," p. 94 in rendering *gtsug lag* as "wisdom in governing,"

and the last phrase *g.yung drung du bton*, which literally reads "[he was] raised to the eternal," as "he attained nirvāṇa." Cf. Bacot's translation in *Documents de Touen-Houang*, p. 152-3, and Ariane Macdonald, "Une lecture des Pelliot tibétain," p. 349.

48 Translated by Snellgrove and Richardson in *A Cultural History of Tibet* (Boston: Shambhala, 1986), pp. 62-3; and again by Snellgrove in *Indo-Tibetan Buddhism*, vol. 2, pp. 394-5. For another English translation, see Stephan V. Beyer, *The Classical Tibetan Language* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992), pp. 276-77. The original Tibetan is found in *Documents de Touen-Houang*, p. 118, with Bacot's translation on pp. 162. Here is all that we find in the *Annals* about this event, which occurred in the Year of the Dog (698): "In the summer the emperor went to the north as a diversion (for hunting). In the winter the great minister Khri 'bring seized the Chinese general Thug pu shi, after inviting him to Tsong ka che chung. That same winter, having disgraced Mgar, the emperor went abroad." *Documents de Touen-Houang*, p. 18.

49 This song has been studied in depth by Géza Uray, in his article "Queen Sad-mar-kar's Songs in the Old Tibetan Chronicle," *Acta Orientalia Hungaricae*, 25.1-3 (1972), pp. 10-25, 36-38.

50 Ellingson, *Mandala of Sound*, p. 70; Stein, *Tibetan Civilization*, p.255; also see Roger Jackson, "Poetry" in Tibet: *Glu, mGur, sNyan ngag* and "Songs of Experience," in *Tibetan Literature: Studies in Genre* (Ithaca: Snow Lion Press, 1996), pp. 368-374.

51 Tsuguhito Takeuchi, "A Passage from the *Shih chi* in the *Old Tibetan Chronicle*" in *Soundings in Tibetan Civilization*, ed. by Barbara Nimri Aziz and Matthew Kapstein, (Delhi: Manohar, 1985), pp. 135-145.

52 Takeuchi, p. 141. The Tang period history, the *Jiu Tangshu*, affirms that the *Wenxuan*, as well as the *Maoshi*, *Liji*, and *Zuozuan* were all sent to the Tibetan court at the request of Princess Jin cheng in 730. See Liu and Hsu et. al, *Chiu Tangshu* (Peking: 1975), 196a: 5232.

53 The most famous *chos 'byung* that describes only the origins of Buddhism in India is the work known as *Rgya gar chos 'byung* (*The History of Buddhism in India*) by Tāranātha. See the translation by Alaka Chattopadhyaya and Lama Chimpa, *Tāranātha's History of Buddhism in India* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1990).

54 Bsod nams rtse mo, the second Sa skya pa patriarch, wrote his history of Buddhism in 1167, most of which is devoted to the life of the Buddha, with only a few pages devoted to the history of Tibetan Buddhism. *Chos la 'jug pa'i sgo* is found in the *Sa skya pa'i Bka' 'bum*, The Toyo Bunko (Tokyo 1968), vol. 2, pp. 318.3-345.3. For a discussion of this work, see Hugh Richardson, "The First Tibetan Chos 'byung," *Tibet Journal* 5.3 pp. 62-73. Nyang ral Nyi ma 'od zer's history devotes considerable more time to the history of Buddhism in Tibet, presented from a Rnying ma perspective. See *Chos 'byung me tog*

snying po sbrang rtsi'i bcud (Gangs can Rig mdzod series no. 5, Lhasa: Bod ljongs mi dmangs dpe skrun khang, 1988).

[55] For a very insightful discussion of the role of self-assertion, competition, and literary and historical self-consciousness at this time, see Janet Gyatso's section on "Historical and Cultural Conditions for Tibetan Autobiography" in *Apparitions of the Self: The Secret Autobiographies of a Tibetan Visionary* (Princeton University Press, 1998), pp. 116-122.

[56] For a discussion of the problems with identifying distinct "genres" of Tibetan literature, see José Cabezón's "Introduction" to *Tibetan Literature: Studies in Genre*, pp. 20-37.

[57] On this text, see Per Sorenson, *Tibetan Buddhist Historiography*, pp. 28-39, 44, and especially n. 77. Another well-known example of a Buddhist history that styles itself as a *rgyal rabs* but is often identified as a *chos 'byung* is Ne'u Paṇḍita Grags pa smon lam blo gros' *An Account of the Past, a Garland of Flowers* (*Sngon gyi gtam me tog phreng ba*). There are also many texts with *chos 'byung* in their titles that do not provide a history of Buddhism, and instead are histories of medicine or doxographies. See Martin, *Tibetan Histories*, pp. 37-38.

[58] R. C. Collingwood in *The Idea of History* first described the "scissors-and-paste" approach to history, but Leonard van der Kuijp used it to describe works of Tibetan historiography. See van der Kuijp "Tibetan Historiography," pp. 44-45.

[59] Per Sorenson, *Tibetan Buddhist Historiography*, p. 12.

[60] Perceval Landon, *Lhasa* (London: Hurst & Blackett, 1905), vol. 1, pp. 340-1, 346.

[61] Hayden White, *The Content of the Form*, p. 21.

[62] For two prominent Tibetologists who use this image of mapping out the *terra incognita* of Tibet, see Erik Haarh, *The Yarlung Dynasty* (Copenhagen: G.E.C. Gad's Forlag, 1969), p. 327, quoted in the opening of the next chapter. More recently, Per Kvaerne concludes his survey of western scholarship on Tibetan Bon by asking what other ultimate purpose is served by such study other than "the obvious motivation of filling in blank spaces in our knowledge of human culture." See "The Bon Religion of Tibet: A Survey of Research," in *The Buddhist Forum* vol. III, ed. by Tadeusz Skorupski and Ulrich Pagel (University of London, School of Oriental and African Studies, 1994), p. 141.

[63] Paul Veyne, *Did the Greeks Believe in Their Myths? An Essay on the Constitutive Imagination*, translated by Paula Wissing (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), p. 6.

[64] Paul Veyne, *Did the Greeks Believe in Their Myths?* p. 7.

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[65] From the translation by Alaka Chattopadhyaya and Lama Chimpa, *Tāranātha's History of Buddhism in India*, p. 5.

[66] Paul Veyne, *Did the Greeks Believe in Their Myths?* p. 9.

[67] The *Legs bshad mdzod* cites the *G.yung drung las rnam pa dag pa'i rgyud*, a twelfth century Bon Tantra on this connection between Bon and Bod. See *Legs bshad rin po che'i gter mdzod* (Beijing: Mi rigs dpe skrun khang, 1985), p. 159; *The Treasury of Good Sayings*, p. 28.

[68] David Snellgrove and Hugh Richardson, *A Cultural History of Tibet*, p. 59. The historical overview of revisionist scholarship on Bon summarized here may be found in greater detail in Per Kvaerne, "The Bon Religion of Tibet: A Survey of Research," pp. 134-138. See also my "Cracking the Mirror," pp. 101-103.

[69] See Ariane Macdonald, "Une lecture des Pelliot tibétain;" David Snellgrove, *The Nine Ways of Bon*, (London: Oxford University Press, 1967), pp. 1-3; also Snellgrove, *Indo-Tibetan Buddhism*, Vol. II (Boston: Shambhala, 1987) pp. 389 ff; and Rolf Stein, "Tibetica Antiqua V: La religione indigéne et les *bon-po* dans les manuscrits de Touen-houang."

[70] For a useful overview of the different positions in the debate over the continuity of Bon, see the article by Samten Karmay, "Un temoignage sur le Bon face au Buddhism à l'epoque des rois Tibétains," in *Contributions on Tibetan and Buddhist Religion and Philosophy*, Vol. II, ed. by Ernest Steinkellner and Helmut Tauscher (Austria: Wien, 1983), pp. 88-106. Karmay's own position has been that there is considerably continuity between the Bon priests and the Bon religion of the eleventh century and afterwards, but he denies that the "Eternal Bon" tradition has its roots in the seventh to ninth centuries. Also see Rolf Stein, "Tibetica Antiqua V: La religione indigéne et les *bon-po* dans les manuscrits de Touen-houang," pp. 27-56, and Samten Karmay's addendum to his article republished in 1998 as "Early Evidence for the Existence of Bon in the Royal Period," in *The Arrow and the Spindle* (Kathmandu: Mandala Publications, 1998), p. 168.

[71] Luis Gómez identifies this tension clearly in his essay "Unspoken Paradigms: Meanderings through the Metaphors of a Field," in *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies*, 18.2 (1995), p. 212: "The contemporary emphasis on 'originality' which is held as an ideal even as we presume that the scholar is not adding anything to his or her sources, the emphasis on discovery in the humanistic disciplines, and the denial that the scholar is a creator like a writer is not only ironic, it is a fundamental contradiction that hides the knotty problem of what is authorship and whose is the authoritative voice."

[72] Spa stan rgyal bzang po, *Bstan pa'i rnam bshad dar rgyas gsal ba'i sgron ma* ed. by Tshe ring Thar (Beijing: Krung go'i bod kyi shes rig dpe skrun khang, 1991), p. 1.

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[73] Bsod nams rgyal mtshan, *Rgyal rabs gsal ba'i me long* (Beijing: Mi rigs dpe skrun khang, 1981), p. 2.

[74] Tibetan Buddhists usually attribute the origins of the *rab byung* system to the chronological calculations found in the *Kālacakra Tantra*. See for example, the discussion by 'Gos Lo tsa ba Gzhon nu dpal in his *Deb ther sngon po* (1476-78), in the translation by George Roerich, *The Blue Annals* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1988), pp. 754 ff. 'Gos Lo tsa ba's work is widely valued by Tibetan historians and foreign Tibetologists for its concern with establishing relative chronologies and synchronizing events in terms of the Buddha's "nirvāṇa." For some good examples of the attention he pays to relative chronology, see pp. 74, 1063, and 1086. Early Rnying ma Tantras also demonstrate knowledge of the twelve year animal cycle in relation to five elements, each with a male and female aspect. See for example the *Sgra thal 'gyur rin po che'i rgyud* (*The Sound That Goes Beyond*), one of the seventeen *Man ngag sde* series of Rnying ma Rdzogs chen Tantras, *Rnying ma'i rgyud bcu bdun*, Ka vol I (Delhi, 1973), p. 49 (25a), l. 5. This passage is quoted by Namkhai Norbu in *Bon, Deu, Bon*, translated by Adriano Clemente and Andrew Lukianowicz (Dharamsala: LTWA, 1995), p. 150.

[75] There are twelve different chronological schemas presented in the *Pad kar shal lung* written in 1447 according to Vostrikov. See *Tibetan Historical Literature*, pp. 114-115. These differences in calculation stem primarily from varying timetables of the decline of Buddhism, where the basic unit of calculation was fixed at 500 years. Some Tibetan Buddhists subscribed to a model of five five-hundred-year cycles of decline until Buddhism would disappear, while others accepted six, seven, or more, up to ten five-hundred-year cycles. What was important in all these eschatological calculations was that the demise of Buddhism must be imminent: the End was near. For a discussion of the various Mahāyāna timetables of decline that served as the basis for Tibetan calculation, see Jan Nattier, *Once Upon a Future Time: Studies in a Buddhist Prophecy of Decline* (Berkeley: Asian Humanities Press, 1991), pp. 46-64. For a discussion of various eschatological models of the Dharma's duration, see Bu ston's *History of Buddhism, Bu ston Chos 'byung*, ed. by Rdo rje rgyal po (Xining: Krung go'i Bod kyi shes rig dpe skrun khang, 1988): "In his description of the various eschatalogical theories of duration, (CHBY 91a1-93b5) and the cessation (CHBY 118a4-122b5), of Saddharma, Bu ston finally settles for the theory predicting the Law to last 5,000 years."

[76] *Mdo gzer mig* ed. by Tshe ring Thar (Xining: Krung go'i bod kyi shes rig dpe skrun khang, 1991), p. 56; for another version see A. H. Franke, "gZer-Myig, A Book of the Tibetan Bonpos," in *Asia Major* Vol 1 (1924), p. 345. It is also worth noting that the wood-male-mouse year is an auspicious date according to the *bstan rtsis* that is attributed to Atiśa, for it is the day when the Buddha entered the womb (~2217 BCE).

[77] Khyung po Blo gros rgyal mtshan, *Rgyal rabs bon gyi 'byung gnas* in *Sources for a History of Bon* (Dolanji: Tibetan Bonpo Monastic Centre, 1972), p. 182. Khyung po

notes on the next page (p. 193) that there is "much disagreement" about the chronology and periodization schemas, and he then quotes the *Gzer mig* as his authority.

[78] Spa stan rgyal bzang po, *Bstan pa'i rnam bshad dar rgyas gsal ba'i sgron me*, ed. by Tshe ring Thar (Beijing: Krung go'i bod kyi shes rig dpe skrun khang, 1991).

[79] Sorenson, *Tibetan Buddhist Historiography*, p. 491 n. 82. Jan Nattier summarizes the 5,000 year timetable developed by Buddhaghosa in *Once upon a Future Time*, pp. 56-59.

[80] B.G. Gokhale, "On Buddhist Historiography," in *New Light on Early Buddhism* (Bombay: Popular Prakashan, 1994), p. 8.

[81] On the *vaṃsa* as a model for Tibetan historiography, see Vostrikov, *Tibetan Historical Literature*, pp. 63-4; also see David Jackson, *The Mollas of Mustang: Historical, Religious and Oratorical Traditions of the Nepalese-Tibetan Borderland* (Dharamsala: Library of Tibetan Works and Archives, 1984), pp. 83-4. On the Indian *vaṃsa* traditions, see Romila Thapar, "Society and Historical Consciousness: The Itihāsa-Purāṇa Tradition," in *Situating Indian History*, ed. by Sabyasachi Bhattacharya and Romila Thapar (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1986), pp. 370ff.

[82] Both Buddhist and Bon histories narrate the story of the first king Mang pos bkur ba (known in Indian Buddhist texts as Mahāsammata, but who appears in some Bon texts in the Zhang zhung language as Tha tsan hi pang skyes), an ideal king who descends from the Abhāsvara devas and is "elected by common consent" by the "black-headed men" of Tibet.

[83] Alexander Macdonald has argued that the legendary model of Aśoka as Buddhist sponsor and cakravartin serves as the prototype for the Tibetan *chos rgyal*. See his article, "Religion in Tibet and the Time of Srong btsan sgam po: Myth as History," pp. 136-140. On the *Mahāvaṃsa*, see Romila Thapar, "Society and Historical Consciousness," p. 382.

[84] For a discussion of the cosmology and anthropogony of Tibetan Buddhist historical literature, see Siglinde Dietz, "Cosmogony as Presented in Tibetan Historical Literature and its Sources," in *Tibetan Studies: Proceedings of the 5th Seminar of the International Association for Tibetan Studies* (Tokyo: Naritasan Shinsoji, 1992), pp. 435-438.

[85] I am reminded here of one of Walter Benjamin's *Theses on the Philosophy of History*, Thesis XVIII:

> "In relation to the history of organic life on earth," writes a modern biologist, "the paltry fifty millennia of *homo sapiens* constitute something like two seconds at the close of a twenty-four-hour day. On this scale, the history of civilized mankind would fill one-fifth of the last second of the last hour." The present, which, as a model of Messianic time, comprises

the entire history of mankind in an enormous abridgement, coincides exactly with the stature which the history of mankind has in the universe.

See *Illuminations*, edited by Hannah Arendt, translated by Harry Zohn. (New York: Schocken Books, 1968), p. 263.

[86] *Mdo gzer mig* ed. by Tshe ring Thar, p. 3.9-11. For an English translation, see A. H. Francke, "gZer-myig, A Book of the Tibetan Bon-pos," p. 305.

[87] *Mdo gzer mig*, p. 13.6-7. For the English translation, see A. H. Francke, "gZer-myig, A Book of the Tibetan Bon-pos," p. 313. The stock phrase *mtho bcad zur bsnyal tsam gcig* ("[Bon] perished as though something lofty was cut down and laid aside") is echoed in later historical texts whenever the topic of Bon's decline is broached and explained in terms of the kalpa of degeneration. See for example the *Dar rgyas gsal sgron*, p. 145.16-19.

[88] Walter Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History," *Illuminations*, p. 255.

[89] This royal testament (*bka' chems*) or edict (*bka' tshig*) first appears in the *Sba bzhed* at the very beginning, where it undoubtedly served to legitimize the reign of Khri srong lde btsan. See Rolf Stein's edition, *Une chronique ancienne de bSam yas: sBa bzhed* (Paris: 1961), p. 1.1-9. The testament appears in a number of *chos 'byung* including Bsod nams rgyal mtshan's *Rgyal rabs gsal ba'i me long* (Beijing: Mi rigs dpe skrun khang, 1981), p. 166.11-20. See also Per Sorenson, *Tibetan Buddhist Historiography*, p. 311 n. 954 and p. 351 n. 1121.

[90] For the Bonpos, the most important Tibetan kings are the second king Mu khri btsan po, who is regarded as an important Tantric lineage holder, and the ninth king, Spu lde gung rgyal, who reintroduced Bon to Tibet after his predecessor Gri gum btsan po persecuted it. While both of these kings have certain divine qualities, they are not identified as emanation bodies in the Bon literature with which I am familiar. On the other hand, the demonic kings who are said to have persecuted Bon, Gri gum btsan po and Khri srong lde btsan, are both regarded as reincarnations of ignoble beings, namely demons and Indian beggars.

[91] Spa stan's *Dar rgyas gsal sgron* (p. 250.8-11; cp. 187.13) mentions Mu zi gsal bzang's trance state in its *bstan rtsis*, where it is calculated that 228 years passed from when Mu zi went into trance until the first *gter ma* were discovered by Gshen chen in 1017. This places his entry into trance in 789, that is, during the reign of Khri srong lde btsan. Other histories however claim that Mu zi went into trance during the earlier persecution of Bon under Gri gum's reign, a claim explicitly denied by Spa stan (p. 168.4-6). The so-called *Rgyal rabs bon gyi 'byung gnas*, also known by Bon historians as the *Gleng gshi bstan pa'i byung khung* by Khyung po Glo gros rgyal mtshan, provides a 800 year limit for Mu zi gsal bzang's trance in its *bstan rtsis*. See *Three Sources for a History of Bon*, ed. by Tenzin Namdak, p. 174. A 1,800 year span is attributed to Mu zi's trance state in the *'Dul ba gling grags*. Also, see K. Mimaki, *Bon sgo gsal byed*, p. 576.

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[92] I have summarized the version of the story found in the *Dar rgyas gsal sgron*, pp. 187-88. For a nearly parallel version, see the *Legs bshad mdzod*, pp. 227-28.

[93] See *Rgyal rabs bon gyi 'byung gnas* in *Three Sources for a History of Bon* (Dolanji: Tibetan Bonpo Monastic Centre, 1974), p. 144.3.

[94] Per Kvaerne, "The Canon of the Tibetan Bonpos," *Indo-Iranian Journal* 16 (1974), p. 38.

[95] Paul Harrison, "A Brief History of the Tibetan bKa' 'gyur," in *Tibetan Literature: Studies in Genre*, ed. by José Ignacio Cabézon and Roger R. Jackson (Ithaca: Snow Lion Press, 1996), p. 77. Drawing upon *The Blue Annals*, Harrison notes that the historian Gzhon nu dpal "paints a vivid picture of the veritable explosion of bKa' 'gyur and bsTan 'gyur copies from sNar thang in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, as Tibet was swept by what we might call a "bKa' 'gyur craze." It seems reasonable to assume that the Bonpos were also participating in the canonization process during the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries.

[96] From *Ma ṇi bka' 'bum* I. 87 (Punakha ed., New Delhi, 1975), translated by Matthew Kapstein, "Remarks on the *Maṇi bKa'-'bum* and the Cult of Avalokiteśvara in Tibet" in *Tibetan Buddhism: Reason and Revelation*, ed. by Steven D. Goodman and Ronald M. Davidson. (SUNY Press, 1992), p. 86.

[97] H. A. Jäschke in his *A Tibetan-English Dictionary with Special Reference to the Prevailing Dialects* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1968), p. 278 defines *'dul ba*: 1. to tame; to break in [horses]; to subdue, conquer, vanquish [enemies]; sometimes even to kill, to annihilate; 2. to till, to cultivate, waste land; to civilize, a nation, which with the Buddhist is the same as to convert, frq; to educate, to discipline, to punish." For more on this term, see Geoffrey Samuel's insightful discussion of the wild/tame polarity in Tibetan culture in his *Civilized Shamans: Buddhism in Tibetan Societies* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1993), pp. 217-222.

[98] As the Ganden Phodrang Code of the Dalai Lamas explains: "Religious law is smooth like a silken knot [around your neck], State law controls like a golden yoke." Cited by Rebecca Redwood French in her study *The Golden Yoke: The Legal Cosmology of Buddhist Tibet* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995), p. 1.

[99] This standard expression of the harmony between the Bon religion and Tibetan politics is found in a number of Bon sources. See the *Legs bshad rin po che'i mdzod* (Beijing: Mi rigs dpe skrun khang, 1985), p. 170.12-19; *Dar rgyas gsal sgron*, p. 141.18-142.4; an abridged version may be found in the *Rgyal rabs bon gyi 'byung gnas* in *Three Sources for a History of Bon*, p. 115.4-.6; also *Bon Chos dar nub gi lo rgyus grags pa rin chen gling grags*, p. 61.1-3; also *G.yung drung bon gyi rgyud 'bum* in *Sources for a History of Bon* (Dolanji: Tibetan Bonpo Monastic Centre, 1972), p. 22.1-3.

[100] The *Rdzogs pa chen po zhang zhung snyan rgyud kyi bon ma nub' pa'i gtan tshigs* reports that after Khri Srong lde'u btsan abolished Bon and killed Lig myi rgya, the latter's wife Khyung bza' mtsha rgyal announced: "The king who protects Bon is dead. The silk knot of Bon religious law is destroyed. The golden yoke of the royal law is smashed." See *History and Doctrine of Bon-po Niṣpaṇṇa-Yoga* (New Delhi: International Academy of Indian Culture, 1968), p. 264.5-6.

[101] In the *Dar rgyas gsal sgron*, Spa stan cites the Northern Treasure Text tradition (*Byang gter*) which affirms that "Buddhist monks grew indulgent. They corrupted the wives and sisters of the subjects, under the pretext that they were engaged in (Tantric) practice; they ate human corpses under the pretext that they were religious offerings; they indulged recklessly in various impure substances with the excuse that they were sacred substances." While the immoral activity of the Buddhist monks may have fooled and used the Tibetan subjects to their own advantage, it can hardly escape the notice of the pure undefiled gods and the divine royal protectors, who the text tells us flee in disgust—only to be replaced by Indian gods and demi-gods. Once the Tibetan protectors are replaced by the Indian gods (a divine reinactment of the Buddhist foreign invasion), "all sorts of unpleasant events befell Tibet: people endured epidemics, their livestock suffered losses, and no rain fell from the sky." *Dar rgyas gsal sgron*, p. 175.17-176.6. Also see *Legs bshad mdzod*, p. 220.20-221.7; *Rgyal rabs bon kyi 'byung gnas*, p. 156.2-4.

[102] Bsod nams rgyal mtshan, *Rgyal rabs gsal ba'i me long*, p. 234.9-14. My translation follows that of McComas Taylor and Lama Choedak Yuthok, in *The Clear Mirror: A Traditional Account of Tibet's Golden Age* (Ithaca: Snow Lion Press, 1996), p. 261. For a less satisfactory translation, see Sorenson's *Tibetan Buddhist Historiography*, p. 427. This passage is reiterated almost verbatim in the *Deb ther dmar po gsar ma*. See Giuseppe Tucci, *Deb ther dmar po gsar ma: Tibetan Chronicles by bSod nams grags pa* (Serie Roma Orientale XXIV, Rome: IsMEO, 1971), p. 31a2-6; English translation on pp. 159-160.

[103] The *Rdzogs pa chen po zhang zhung snyan rgyud kyi rnam bsad gsal ba'i me long*, also known as the *Biographies of Lamas Within the Zhang zhung Oral Transmission Lineage of Great Completion*, appears in *History and Doctrine of Bon-po Niṣpaṇṇa-Yoga*, ed. by Dr. Lokesh Chandra and Tenzin Namdak (Sata-Pitaka Series, Vol. 73, New Delhi: International Academy of Indian Culture, 1968), fol. 1-129. The *Crystal Mirror of Doctrinal Systems* may be found in *Thu'u bkvan grub mtha'* (Zhin hwa: Gan su'i mi rigs dpe skrun khang, 1985). For an analysis of the chapter in the *Crystal Mirror of Doctrinal Systems* on Bon, see my "Cracking the Mirror," pp. 92-107.

[104] Rong ston Chos rje, *Bon Chos kyi bstan pa shan dbye* in Ngag dbang Chos sgrags *Gsung gnag lam 'bras* ed. by Tashi Dorje (Dolanji: Tibetan Bonpo Monastic Centre, 1976), p. 541.4-5. Also see Rong ston's *Bon Chos rnam 'byed snang gsal rig pa'i me long* (Dolanji: Bonpo Monastic Centre).

[105] Tāranātha's *Rgya gar chos 'byung* fol 43b, translated by Alaka Chattopadhyaya and Lama Chimpa in *Tāranātha's History of Buddhism in India* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1990).

[106] Khyung po Blo gros rgyal mtshan, *Rgyal rabs bon gyi 'byung gnas* in *Sources for a History of Bon*, p. 25.

[107] Hayden White, *The Content of the Form*, p. 21.

CHAPTER II

SUMMONING SPIRITS AND INVOKING ANCESTORS: LOCATING BON "SHAMANISM"

In descriptions of the Bon religion in Tibet by western missionaries, travelers, and scholars over the last century, the term that has become most associated with Bon is "Shamanism." Shamanism has been used to re-name what is widely regarded as Tibet's primordial native religion; its endurance as a category demonstrates a need to designate the indigenous religion in familiar western terms. There is a deep longing felt by many scholars, both past and present, to recover Tibet's silent origins, to identify the tracks of Tibet's prehistoric religious development, and then to discover whatever modern manifestations might exist on the margins of Tibet. This longing exerts a powerful pull on the imaginations of Tibetans and Tibetologists alike. In introducing his study of the myths and legends of ancient Tibet, Erik Haarh expresses his own fascination with exploring Tibet's uncharted territory:

> Studying the ancient Tibetan concept of life and death means intruding upon virgin soil. This feature of old Tibetan culture is, indeed, so utterly unknown and unexplored, that the ideas which have been advanced above, in the first instant may even appear with the cast of chimera.... Very few Tibetologists have ventured forth to explore, even superficially, this blank spot on the map of ancient Tibetan culture and history.[1]

Haarh's description of the pre-Buddhist period as a "blank spot" on the Tibetan map might seem apt when one considers the paucity of archeological and textual evidence available today about pre-Buddhist Tibet. Yet there seems to be a magnetic quality to this lacuna. The "blank spot" has been filled in by the imaginative projections of pioneering Tibetologists, with Shamanism as the label of choice for mapping this territory. We will

see that Shamanism itself has "the cast of chimera," for it is an elusive term that tells us more about the history and needs of the western researcher than of ancient Tibet.

Like its conceptual kin "Mysticism," "Tantrism," or "Lamaism,"[2] "Shamanism" proves to be a remarkably complex, multivalent term that has informed our interpretation and evaluation of Tibetan religion, and especially the relationship of Bon to Buddhism. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, many western writers used Shamanism as a monolithic category to subsume a great variety of religious phenomena. Most often it was assigned to the "native" tradition of Bon, with its dark occult practices. Black magic, fetishism, sorcery, divination, demonolatry, necromancy, exorcism, ecstatic trance, spirit possession, and various other supernatural powers were all thought to lie at the heart of Bon Shamanism. Though this noun was used loosely and indiscriminately, its function as an emblem of Tibet's ancient religious substrata becomes most evident when it is working behind the scenes in the drama of Tibetan history, a drama in which scholars cast Buddhism in the spotlight. For many of the early Tibetologists, aboriginal Bon was regarded as "given" or "uninterpreted," which gave them license to impose their own categories to label its strange features. Like so many other categories used in the study of "native" religions, shamanism begs to be analyzed as an exotic essence that is used for identifying the religion of the other, marking a "primitive" stage of religious and social evolution.

This chapter will trace how the pejorative evaluation of Bon shamanism comes to be challenged in the mid-twentieth century with the development of phenomenological studies of Tibetan religion. These "scientific" studies of Tibetan shamanism systematically catalogue its typical features, and the investigators often eschew the barbaric rhetoric that had been used to dismiss Bon as "primitive." Once the features of shamanism are identified, and the shaman's social function is described, the phenomenologist devotes considerable attention to describing the shaman's experience and to interpreting the shaman's symbolism. There is no hiding the fascination that these

scholars feel for the Bon shaman as the exotic explorer of the netherworlds, with his wild theatrical appearance. Some scholars seem under a nostalgic spell when they idealize shamanism as Tibet's genuine archaic spirituality.

Among recent anthropologists, shamans in Nepal and Tibet have come to be understood in relation to Buddhist lamas, with their social and religious roles interpreted dialectically. In pitting shamans in duel and dialogue with Buddhist lamas, the shamans are often celebrated as spirit mediums whose "deconstructive voices" subvert Buddhist textual authority and the hegemony of clerical values. Here shamans have been salvaged by anthropologists as authentic healers, whose ecstatic experiences place them in a privileged position to criticize and resist the official orthodoxy of Buddhist lamas. For some anthropologists the shaman, whose roots go back to ancient Bon, is a trickster who undermines the elitism of their Buddhist opponents, subverting their moral seriousness and their dependence on textual knowledge.

Some Tibetologists remain skeptical of the value of "shamanism" in plotting the religious features of Bon, for they recognize that the term itself has the "cast of chimera." Numerous European scholars who specialize in the study of Bon literature have pointed out that the abstract noun "shamanism" has no equivalent in the Tibetan language, and thus it is not a "native" category. They deny that the Bon tradition has any precise analogue to the Tungus shaman (*śaman*) of Siberia. "Shamanism" in their estimation, is simply irrelevant and inappropriate for describing Bon, or indeed for describing any aspect of Tibetan religion. These textual scholars have sought to banish the ghost of "shamanism" from the study of Bon entirely. Their wish to deflate the term's value in academic discourse about Bon and Tibetan religion has not proved successful, however. Shamanism has earned a widespread currency in academic exchange, a much-inflated value in popular western spiritual circles, and even acceptance among Tibetans practicing in the west today. Current anthropologists, not to mention western enthusiasts of Buddhism and Tibetan Bonpos themselves, continue to find new manifestations of

shamanism in Tibetan religion. Despite the protests of some of the leading western Tibetologists then, shamanism continues to resurface in the literature available on Bon and Buddhism, proving its resilience as a critical term.[3]

From a vantagepoint located at some distance from the field of Tibetan Studies, it will become clear that shamanism is not a single natural object that has been progressively disclosed by the objective scrutiny of western scholars. Rather, shamanism is a term that has been employed for a variety of ideological purposes. What makes the Bon shaman such an interesting image to track, from the benighted primitive to the post-modern visionary, from the diabolical priest to the New Age spiritual healer, is that it serves as a mirror that reveals much about those who have sought (and found) the shaman. Shamanism has been variously identified and represented according to the changing imaginative and social needs of the investigators. Wherever shamanism has been identified—whether in texts, or in a lived social environment, or in potent symbolic material—its location has influenced the form of reasoning used to render it intelligible. As Jean-Pierre Vernant stated succinctly, the subject of a scholar's study is constrained by the reasoning and the disciplinary methods available, as well as by the scholar's orientation to religion:

> Reason does not exist until human beings attempt to understand some aspect of reality and to apply what they learn. Scientific rationality defines itself as it constructs the subject matter and methodology of each new discipline. In the human sciences, moreover, there is no virgin territory to explore; the fields of investigation are continents mapped by tradition and explored by religious thought. Trails have been blazed, itineraries set out. The problems that arise in any new field of study are always in some sense echoes of current social concerns, questions of identity: society seeks to know its roots in the past, its responsibilities in the present, and its fate in the future.[4]

Far from being "neutral" or "objective," the methods used by historians, philologists, and anthropologists are inevitably socially conditioned and informed by religious tradition.

Vernant's comment that there is "no virgin territory to explore" in the human sciences applies to both ancient Tibet and modern Tibetology too, and it raises questions about Haarh's earlier assertion. When Tibetologists like Haarh set out to map the territory of prehistoric Tibetan religion, their representations have followed the paths already blazed by Tibetan Buddhists, who developed their own images, categories, and classificatory schemas to describe the Bon "other" (*gzhan sde*). What went unrecognized by many Tibetologists is how much their imaginative construction of ancient Tibetan history and Bon Shamanism was indebted to Buddhist apologetics and polemics. It is therefore a mistake to dismiss Bon shamanism as merely the product of the scholars' own disciplinary methods, religious biases, and intellectual fads, for their evaluation of Bon and their fixation on its strange "shamanic" features were informed by Buddhist polemical images too.

The purpose of this chapter is to explore some of these complex interconnections, the interplay between certain Tibetan and western categories in the evaluation of Bon as an object of study. In addition to presenting a rough chronological survey of the western study of Bon, and examining the varying features regarded as its shamanic characteristics, I will consider why the category shamanism is used and what discursive purposes it has served. Although a number of well-known Tibetologists have dismissed the word as inappropriate for describing Bon, this chapter will not simply rehearse their objections but offer a critical genealogy of the term, which continues to be used in representations of Bon. My task is to historicize a category that has too often been treated as "natural" in discourse on Tibetan religions. In order to understand the fluctuating evaluations of Bon in terms of Tibet's religious development, I will also tease out their implicit historical models, noting at times their indebtedness to Tibetan historical narratives and Buddhist-Bon polemics.

At the heart of this chapter lies a problem that Michel Foucault once identified as the "age-old distinction between the Same and the Other."[5] Situated in the Tibetan

context, this is the problem of how to represent the Other (Bon) without collapsing it into the categories and definitions of the Same (the west, or Buddhism), and without making the Other so different and unique that interpretation becomes impossible. I do not pretend to offer a solution to this age-old problem here, but rather to show how this tension has been played out in a specific field of discourse. All too often scholars in the field of Tibetan and Buddhist Studies have acted as if they inhabited a Pure Land, transcending the impure realm of sectarian politics and colonialism. This chapter intends to disabuse such illusions, and to offer instead a reflexive awareness of the inherent tensions in representing the other. Some degree of freedom may be possible once one recognizes the constraints of one's field.

The Pioneering Studies of Tibetan Bon Shamanism

The earliest studies of Tibetan religions at the end of the nineteenth century and into the first few decades of the twentieth by Sarat Chandra Das, L. Austine Waddell, and Charles Bell, were truly pioneering efforts. These authors were colonial administrators, civil servants, and explorers, who served as functionaries for the British imperial government that sought to exploit the unknown reaches of the world. Their interest in Tibetan religions as amateur Orientalists intersected with their government's colonial interests, particular in their effort to gain control over potential Tibetan subjects. In mapping out Tibet's ancient religious world, they relied on western categories and created comparisons with more familiar religions. As the pre-historic religion of Tibet, Bon was regarded as unmarked territory, which gave these Orientalists license to impose their own names on the primordial tradition: to name the native religion in western terms was to claim it. The labels used by these scholars for identifying this primitive religion varied, but they included "animism," "fetishism," "nature worship," as well as "shamanism." What these seemingly interchangeable categories share is their place in

late nineteenth century western discourse about the evolution of religions, lying at the very origins or the earliest stages of religious development in uncivilized cultures. However labeled, this primitive religion was regarded as static and a-historic, incapable of changing or developing on its own. Vestiges of it were thought to still exist in remote areas of Tibet and in tribal border regions, for example among the Lepchas of Sikkim, or the Naxi of Yunnan. It is from their exposure to the beliefs and practices of tribal peoples in their travels that these amateur Orientalists were able to flesh out the features of pre-historic Bon. The isolation of these tribal people was thought to make them living fossils that preserved the indigenous features of "original Bon."

The early students of Tibetan religion all accepted that Bon changed once Buddhism came to Tibet from India. Buddhism was regarded as an agent of civilization, and the followers of Bon could not help but feel inferior to these newcomers, with their impressive texts, their profound philosophy, and their soteriology. The Bonpos responded by imitating Buddhism, adopting its symbols and placing their own practices in the service of Buddhist soteriology. In doing so, it is claimed that the Bonpos developed a literary tradition that mimicked Buddhism in form and content. The interaction between the native Bon and Buddhism created some confusion among Orientalists in how to assess their relationship, often described with metaphors of impurity and mixture. However, there is consensus among Orientalists that Buddhism was the more evolved and authentic religion. Another common tendency found in these early reports and studies of Tibetan religion was to compare foreign Bon with more familiar beliefs and practices. Making sense of the strange in terms of the familiar, these frontier comparativists resorted to analogies between Bon practices and known religions and superstitions.

Let us begin by looking at how "Bon" was defined by H. A. Jäschke in his *Tibetan-English Dictionary* published in 1881.

> *Bon* 1. n. of the early religion of Tibet, concerning which but very imperfect accounts are existing (v. *Report of the Royal Bavarian Academy of Science*, 13 Jan. 1866); so much is certain, that sorcery was the principle feature of it. When Buddhism became the religion of state, the former was considered heretical and condemnable, and *lha chos* and *bon chos*, or shorter *chos* and *bon*, were placed in opposition, as with us christianity and paganism (v. *Glr* [*Rgyal rab gsal ba'i me longs*] and *Mil.* [*Mi la ras pa rgyud 'bum*]; at the present time, both of them seem to exist peaceably side by side, and the primitive religion has not only numerous adherents and convents in Central Tibet, but manifold traces of it may be found still in the creed of the Tibetans to-day.— 2. = *bon-po*, follower of this religion.[6]

There are a few aspects of this definition worthy of comment. First, Jäschke points out that despite there being few reliable western descriptions of early (pre-Buddhist) Bon available, what can be said with confidence is that its main feature was "sorcery." He does not offer any explanation of what this "sorcery" entails, nor does he cite any Bon practices as examples. This might be asking too much from a dictionary entry, yet Jäschke himself promises in the Preface of his Dictionary that he will "give a rational account of the development of the values and meanings of words" and offer "accurate and copious illustrations and examples."[7] The simple metonymy (Bon —> sorcery) requires no further explanation because "sorcery" is not meant to describe Bon in any detailed way, or serve an analytic purpose; rather, the term evokes the essential character of Bon: dark, opaque, even sinister. It seems that Jäschke uses "sorcery" as an empty placeholder rather than an analytic description of Bon.[8] Its usage evokes a sense of mystery about Bon while placing it at the primitive stage of cultural evolution, more akin to superstition than religion proper.

Jäschke adds, however, that when Buddhism was adopted as Tibet's state religion, Bon was condemned by the Buddhists as heretical, just as Christians condemned pagan heresies. The tense relationship between *chos/bon* is described in Tibetan religious literature, as we saw in the previous chapter of this dissertation, and here Jäschke mentions two well-known Buddhist texts. What is noteworthy is that he accepts without question the Buddhist evaluation of Bon as heterodox. His comparison of Buddhism/Bon

to Christianity/paganism is quite telling, and it foretells the Buddhist bias presumed by so many subsequent students of these two religions. "Original" Bon becomes equated with the dark and static native tradition, while Buddhism is likened to the enlightened and uplifting force of a missionary religion, Christianity. A Moravian missionary, Jäschke believed that Indian Buddhism had a civilizing impact on Tibet, for it prepared the Tibetans to accept the higher teachings of Christianity. In fact his dictionary was composed with the intention of disseminating Christianity and European civilization among the Buddhists in the Tibetan-speaking regions of Central Asia.[9] Although Jäschke did not define Bon as "shamanism," his confident characterization of it as a primitive religion represented by its "sorcery" would be accepted by his Orientalist successors. However, many would dispute Jäschke's claim that primitive Bon continued to be practiced in convents in Tibet. Whereas Jäschke's definition treats Bon as a flourishing though primitive religion in central Tibet, we shall see in later accounts how Bon becomes marginalized, forced to the Tibetan frontier.

The next scholar after Jäschke to compile a Tibetan-English dictionary was the Bengali Tibetologist, Sarat Chandra Das. While Das was a well respected Bengali Babu, with numerous impressive titles (C.I.E., Fellow of the Royal Society, Fellow of the Royal Geographic Society), he also served as a spy for the British Survey of India and conducted fact-finding missions in Tibet while posing as a Buddhist pilgrim.[10] Equipped with survey tools and a sextant, with a compass secretly stashed inside his prayer wheel, Das visited Tibet twice and managed to reach Lhasa undetected in 1882. The disguise worked for a while, but when the Tibetan authorities in Lhasa grew suspicious of his true identity, they banished him from the country. Das's excursion in Tibet proved not only useful for the British government, but his ethnographic studies of religion, his knowledge of colloquial Tibetan, and his smuggling of important texts out of Tibet made a lasting impact on Tibetan studies.

The contributions of Sarat Chandra Das to the development of Bon studies in particular cannot be underestimated. His very first publication in the *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal* was devoted to "The Bon (Pön) Religion."[11] This article featured an English translation of a short chapter on Bon excerpted from a lengthy text entitled *The Crystal Mirror of Doctrinal Systems* (*Grub mtha' shel gyi me long*), a doxography written by the Buddhist scholar Thu'u bkvan Chos kyi nyi ma. Although Das only translated the section on Bon from this encyclopedic work without offering any of his own commentary, its content became the authoritative source for western representations of Bon, at least until quite recently. In addition to this article that we will discuss below, Das later published a Tibetan edition of a Bon history that he had smuggled out of Tibet, a fifteenth century Bon text named by Das as *Rgyal rabs Bon gyi 'byung gnas* (*The Origins of Bon, a Royal Genealogy*).[12] This is the first Bon historical text made available to western Tibetologists. While it received some attention from European scholars, the *Origins of Bon* played a less significant role in shaping how western scholars evaluated Bon than the short chapter that Das had translated earlier from *The Crystal Mirror of Doctrinal Systems.*

Perhaps Sarat Chandra Das's most important scholarly contribution was his Dictionary, which became a standard resource tool for translating Tibetan texts into English. In it we find the following definition for Bon:

> *Bon* 1. The ancient religion of Tibet which was fetishism, demon worship, and propitiation by means of incantations. The word *chos* which ordinarily means religion is used as the antithesis to *bon*. Bon now signifies the kind of Shamanism which was followed by Tibetans before the introduction of Buddhism and in certain parts still extant; of this there were three stages, namely: *'dsol bon*, *'khyar bon*, and *bsgyur bon.*[13]

This definition presents both parallels to and contrasts with Jäschke's earlier characterization. Both definitions note the opposition between *chos/bon*, an indigenous Tibetan distinction; but here *chos* is associated with religion, while we are told that *bon* is the antithesis of *chos*, namely "fetishism, demon worship, and propitiation by means of

incantations." Das then substitutes the umbrella term "Shamanism" for all of the superstitious practices of the Tibetans before the appearance of Buddhism. The identification of Bon with shamanism receives no further elaboration by Das, just as Jäschke simply substituted "sorcery" for Bon without any explanation or examples. Shamanism is the single term that Das chooses here and elsewhere for translating Bon.[14] While shamanism is never specified in any detail, Das does add that Bon appeared in three different stages in Tibet, namely *'dsol bon*, *'khyar bon*, and *bsgyur bon*, terms that are left untranslated and uncredited to any Tibetan writer. The reader is left with the impression that these three phases of Bon, which Das correlates to the periods of reign of specific "historical king[s] of Tibet," constitute the Bonpo's method of classifying Bon religious development. Yet the source for this three-fold schema of Bon historical development cannot be found in the *Origins of Bon*, the history Das later published, nor is it used in any Bon history. Instead, we must look to the chapter on Bon found in the *Crystal Mirror of Doctrinal Systems* (hereafter CMDS) as the source relied upon by Das. For reasons that will become clear, Das accepted the conceit of this doxography that it was a "crystal mirror" that accurately reflects the history of the Bon religion, while any Bon history was of questionable authority.

The meaning and content of the three-fold scheme found in the CMDS will be briefly reviewed here, and its appeal to Das and other scholars will be addressed. Thu'u kvan's short chapter on Bon serves as a survey of the religion, but it is certainly contentious, a not so subtle attempt to undermine and delegitimize Bon as an authentic tradition. This becomes apparent once the names for the three stages of Bon are translated properly. According to Thu'u bkvan the first type of Bon to appear in Tibet is *brdol Bon*, although Das writes this as *'dsol Bon* in his Dictionary. In his translation of the CMDS, Das leaves the first phase untranslated as "Jola Bon." This simple transliteration is unsatisfactory. The Tibetan term *brdol* has a polemical tone to it, meaning the Bon that "erupts" suddenly or "breaks out," like a boil or a pimple that mars the fair white

landscape of Tibet. The formula used by Thu'u bkvan to encapsulate this primordial stage of Bon, when it erupted during the reigns of the first seven Tibetan kings, is that it "suppressed the demons below, made offerings to the ancestral gods above, and expelled [impurities] from the household hearth in the middle."[15] Other Buddhist polemicists agree that early Bon was downright barbaric, consisting primarily of black magic, untrustworthy divinations (*ju tig*), and the suppression of vampires (*sri gnon*).[16] In fact, the Buddhist descriptions of Bon correspond to some degree with late-nineteenth century stereotypes about primitive magic, sorcery, and demonolatry. By uncritically relying on these polemical images, Das and later scholars have used the generic category of "shamanism" to describe Bon in its earliest manifestations. What is common to both western and Buddhist conceptions of this earliest phase of Bon is their denial of any legitimate development to the tradition: it remains frozen in the past, like an unholy relic from Tibet's dark ages.

The second diffusion is called "erroneous" or "debased Bon" (*'khyar Bon*) because it required bloody animal sacrifices (*sogs dmar*). Upon the death of the eighth Tibetan king Gri gum btsan po, three Bon funerary specialists were said to have been invited from Kashmir, Gilgit and Zhang zhung to perform the necessary rites for the king's corpse. In addition to introducing these mortuary rites, they also brought with them new forms of magic and divination, which had not previously been practiced in Tibet. Thu'u bkvan also notes that the Tibetan Bonpos later developed their philosophical views, which were a mixture of "debased Bon" with the tenets of Śaivite heretics (*tirthika*).[17] This passage is the *locus classicus* for the diffusionist model of foreign influence on Tibetan Bon. From this initial germ of Śaivism the "virus of influence" will spread contagiously in later western scholarship to include Hinduism, Taoism, Manichaenism, Nestorianism, and even Gnosticism as the real source of "deviant Bon." Here we see a pattern often used in the representation of indigenous religions, namely the use of a genealogical model of history. The strange beliefs and practices of Bonpos were

said to be derived from more familiar ancient sources outside Tibet, but in the process of their diffusion they became corrupted and mixed (*'dres ma*), hence "deviant Bon."

The last stage of the dissemination of Bon is called "transformed" or "plagiarized" Bon (*bsgyur Bon*), which refers to the deceitful appropriation of Buddhist or quasi-Buddhist ideas in Bon texts. Thu'u bkvan identifies three separate occasions when individuals recovered apocryphal texts that were Buddhist in content but were claimed as Bon revelations. These individuals were not always Bonpos themselves, for he mentions specifically a "blue-robed paṇḍita" (*pandi ta sham thabs sngon po can*) who wrote heretical teachings (*chos log*) and hid them as "treasure texts" (*gter ma*), only to reveal them himself and then mix them with Bon.[18] Since these recovered texts were cached ahead of time by the so-called "treasure revealer" (*gter ston*), these texts are disqualified as fakes, or what we might call "pseudo-apocrypha," since they were not genuine revelations but merely heretical teachings or plagiarized Buddhist texts. Here Thu'u bkvan debunks the entire genre of Bon revealed treasure literature, which delegitimizes Bon claims to authenticity and severs their connection to the venerable past. It is easy to see how scholars like Das, who uncritically accepted Thu'u bkvan's presentation of Bon, adopted a dismissive attitude and a suspicious point of view toward Bon literature. Bon texts were never what they claimed to be.

At one point in his chapter Thu'u bkvan apologizes almost parenthetically that he did not himself find a (Bon?) text that explained in detail how Bon spread and what its philosophical positions are, but he relied upon the account given by the "sage of 'Bri gung" for his explanation of how Bon arose during the three periods of dissemination.[19] Thu'u bkvan's acknowledgement of his indebtedness to an earlier Buddhist author went unnoticed by Sarat Chandra Das and later scholars of Bon until quite recently, when Dan Martin showed that the CMDS is almost entirely derivative, a patching together of various earlier Buddhist polemical sources against Bon. By placing the CMDS in the context of early Tibetan polemics and demonstrating its constructed, intertextual

character. Martin's research certainly diminished the authoritative status of this chapter on Bon. Today Thu'u bkvan's *Crystal Mirror* has been cracked, its anti-Bon polemical agenda revealed, and its reliability called into question because of its sectarian motivation and ideological agenda.[20]

Nonetheless during the period when Das first introduced this survey of Bon, Thu'u bkvan's critical perspective proved so persuasive that Bon texts were read with suspicion or with disappointment. Das's translation of this work in 1881 coincided with Anton Schiefner's German translation of a Bon Sūtra (*Klu 'bum dkar po*) entitled *Über das Bon-po Sūtra "Das weisse Naga-hunderttausend.*"[21] The impact of the CMDS on subsequent scholarship was far greater than that of the Bon Sūtra, this despite the polemical character of the former and the genuine canonical status (in Bon terms) of the latter. While the Bon Sūtra presented an complex cosmogony and a detailed picture of the cthonic spirit (*klu*) realm, it lacked the encyclopedic scope and simplicity of the CMDS, and its overtly mythic character could hardly compete with the historical narrative set forth by Thu'u bkvan. The simplicity and vagueness of Thu'u bkvan's representation of early Bon especially excited western scholars who were drawn to its seemingly archaic and primitive aspects. The Bon Sūtra, on the other hand, contained far too many themes that were recognizable as Buddhist. One student of Bon noted that when Schiefner's translation of *The White Nāga Hundred Thousand* appeared, "the scientific world was disappointed for it was considered not to be different from a Buddhist Sūtra."[22] That is, the content of the Bon Sūtra was not foreign enough, and it could only have contained what Thu'u bkvan identified as "plagiarized Bon" (*bsgyur bon*). What scholars were most interested to learn about was "original" or "revealed Bon" in its raw state, when it could be labeled as shamanism.

Another early pioneer in the study of Tibetan religion, who followed in the footsteps of Sarat Chandra Das, was a Japanese Buddhist pilgrim and scholar named Ekai Kawaguchi. Like so many other Buddhist pilgrims before him, Kawaguchi left his native

Japan for India, Nepal, and Tibet in search of important Mahāyāna Buddhist texts, with the goal of bringing them back to the libraries of the Japanese Imperial University. Kawaguchi actually studied with Sarat Chandra Das in Darjeeling before setting out for Tibet disguised as a Chinese pilgrim. His Tibetan travelogue, written in a style similar to other travelers' tales about Tibet, emphasizes the exotic and is prone to exaggeration; even the title of his book *Three Years in Tibet* is misleading, since he was there for barely two years. Kawaguchi's overall impression of Tibet and its Buddhism was quite unfavorable, and he repeatedly condemns the Buddhist monks he meets for being filthy, for their ignorance of true Buddhism, their greed for meat and sexual pleasure, and worst of all, their cruelty in the punishment of sinners. Filled with hatred, ignorance and greed, how could these Tibetan monks be true Buddhists?

What Kawaguchi finds especially repellent in Tibet are married monks who practice the "peculiar and ridiculous form of wedlock" known as polyandry, a perverse practice that he claims has its roots in "Old Bonism." What exactly constitutes "Old Bonism" is never explained by Kawaguchi, other than to mention a few depravities still enjoyed by Tibetans, such as animal sacrifice and the use of intoxicants. For the most part, however, he affirms that Bon "continues to exist only for its name's sake."[23] That is, Bonpos insist upon their distinctive name despite the fact that their doctrines and practices are copied from Buddhism. He explains that once Tibet adopted Buddhism, the Bonpos borrowed Buddhist teachings and practices and made them their own, hence his label "New Bonism:"

> In sooth, Buddhism is so deeply ingrained in the country that no other religion can exist in Tibet, unless it be explained by the light of Buddhism. Thus, the Old Bon religion has been greatly modified and has indeed entirely lost its original form and been replaced by the New Bonism, which resembles the Ryôbu Shinto of Japan, in which the Sun God is interpreted as the incarnation of Buddha; but the Tibetan goes further than the Ryôbu Shintoist did. By Bon is meant Shinnyo or Truth, or rather the incarnation of Shinnyo, and it is considered to be one branch of Buddhism.[24]

It should not surprise us that Kawaguchi, a Buddhist monk, would accept the notion that Bonpos sought to recast their somber religion in the enlightened image of Buddhism, and were so successful at adopting it that their new religion is Bon "in name only." Elsewhere he writes that this religion is, in truth, "only Buddhism under another name."[25] His distinction between "Old" and "New" is meant to unmask the masquerade of Bon, that it merely mimics authentic Buddhism while still claiming for itself the Truth. To name is to claim, and once false names like "Bon" are revealed as empty designations we see Kawaguchi staking claim to it with more familiar labels.

Kawaguchi seems struck by how much New Bonism resembles the syncretic tradition of his native country, *Ryôbu Shinto* ("Two-Sided" Shinto). Here Kawaguchi engages in a form of ethnographic comparison that posits an analogy between Bon-Buddhist syntheses in Tibet and the Shinto-Buddhist combinatory patterns in Japan, where native Shinto kami were reinterpreted as Buddha manifestations. Ethnographic comparison does not rely on geographic proximity or any direct historical connections between Japanese and Tibetan religions, as a genealogical model would require, but it relies instead on the travelers' impression of similar features. The traveler uses comparison as a way to link the foreign world he encounters with the familiar world in which his narrative of the other is recounted, and thereby pass from one to another. With an apt metaphor François Hartog captures how travelers' comparisons operate:

> It is a net the [traveling] narrator throws into the waters of otherness. The size of the mesh and the design of the net determine the type and quality of the catch. And hauling in the net is a way of bringing home what is "other" into proximity with what is the "same." Comparison thus has a place in the rhetoric of otherness, operating there as a procedure of translation.[26]

The net used by our Japanese traveler here is designed to identify Tibetan patterns of religious synthesis and assimilation. Just as "New Bonism" reinterprets Tibetan indigenous deities as the manifestations of Buddhas and bodhisattvas, so does "Two-Sided Shinto" identify the native Sun Goddess and ancestress of the imperial family

(Amaterasu at the Ise Shrine) with the Sun Buddha (Mahāvairocana). This comparison between Buddhism/Bon and Buddhism/Shinto might yield considerable fruit were Kawaguchi to consider the esoteric Buddhist themes in Japan and Tibet that enable these combinatory systems to operate.[27] However, his casual broaching of the comparison reveals no interest in exploring these structural parallels in any sustained manner.

What troubles Kawaguchi about the transformation of Old Bon into New Bon is what is lost in the process of assimilation, almost as if the indigenous Bon deities and practices, once robed in Buddhist symbols, become robbed of their distinctiveness. Kawaguchi notes how the Tibetan stubbornly insists that "Bon" represents Truth, or in his own language, "Bon" incarnates "Shinnyo." It is not altogether clear to me what Kawaguchi intends here. It is possible that he wishes to underscore the discontinuity between "Old" and "New", since all that they share is their referent, the empty term "Bon." But if "New" Bon incarnates "Truth," and this singular Truth is identified by Kawaguchi with Shinnyo (Skt. *tathātā*), understood as the very root of Buddhism, then Bon must be seen as an offshoot (or "branch") of Buddhism. Kawaguchi appears to shift from an impressionistic feeling about the similarities between Tibetan and Japanese religions to a genealogical comparison once he locates the real root of Bon ("Shinnyo"). This linguistic sleight-of-hand makes New Bon truly Buddhist, but it leaves Old Bon nowhere.

Kawaguchi is certainly not the first outsider to see striking similarities between foreign Bon and his own "native" tradition. We know that the Chinese who encountered Bonpos in eastern Tibet considered them to be Taoists, and some believed that Gshen rab, the founder of Bon, was really Laozi.[28] In return, there were Tibetans who regarded as Bonpos the Chinese Taoists, whose founder Laozi was merely a manifestation of Gshen rab; in fact, Thu'u bkvan himself advances such a claim in his *Crystal Mirror of Doctrinal Systems*.[29] It should not surprise us that a certain Tibetan Buddhist Lama, who once visited the Ise Shrine in Japan, remarked of the *Kagura*-dance performed there, "It

is just like the sacred dance of the Bon religion."[30] Such comparisons do not shock us since we all need to make the foreign familiar. It is only "natural" for non-Tibetans to see in Bon and in Buddhism a mirror of their own religion as it relates to another.[31] But in seeing these similarities, experienced subjectively like the uncanny feeling of déjà vu, the comparativist often puts forward some objective explanation, as Jonathan Z. Smith points out in his essay "In Comparison a Magic Dwells:"

> In the vast majority of instances in the history of comparison, this subjective experience is projected as an objective connection through some theory of influence, diffusion, borrowing, or the like. It is a process of working from a psychological association to an historical one; it is to assert that similarity and contiguity have causal effect. But this, to revert to the language of Victorian anthropology, is not science but magic.[32]

Smith's sly observation here, that comparative studies as an enterprise bear more resemblance to magic than science, will be more challenging (and embarrassing) for later comparativists who claim their work is "scientific," such as Helmut Hoffmann and Réne de Nebesky-Wojkowitz, phenomenologists who produce detailed descriptions of Tibetan Bon shamanism that we will examine shortly. For the Europeans to first encounter Tibetan religion, the Christian missionaries who preceded scholars like Das and Kawaguchi, the similarities they saw between Tibetan religion and their own Christian tradition could only be explained by "magic." More precisely, the eerie resemblances they sensed were regarded as the worst form of "black magic," being the work of the Devil. The mirror-like images they encountered in Tibet, where monks also wore robes, rosaries and vestments, with sacerdotal mitres on their heads, were understood as demonic plagiarism.

The first European Catholic missionaries to gain contact with Tibetan monks frequently observed how familiar they seemed in their dress and ritual performances, with their liturgical chants and baroque ceremonies, altars and images, candles and incense. Yet these apparent similarities caused them consternation. For the near mirror image they saw before them could only be explained as the work of the Devil, the

demonic other incarnate. There is a strong sense of anxiety apparent in the words of the Jesuit Athanasius Kircher, who said of the Tibetan's faith in the Fifth Dalai Lama:

> Here are plainly evident the wiles of the Devil. To make a mock of holy things and rob God of the honor due unto Him the Evil One has by a trick of his usual cunning caused these barbarians to imitate us, and induced them to pay to a human being the reverence due to God and Jesus Christ alone. He profanes the most holy mysteries of the Catholic Church by forcing these poor wretched creatures to celebrate these mysteries at the place where they keep hideous idols. Because he has observed that Christians call the Pope Father of Fathers, he makes these idolatrous barbarians call that false god Grand Lama or high priest.[33]

The Tibetan barbarian's mimicry is deeply menacing to Kircher, who relies on the theory of demonic plagiarism to account for the similarities between Catholicism and Tibetan religion. The idea of demonic plagiarism was invented by Justin Martyr and the early church fathers of the second and third centuries to explain away any apparent correspondences between the Catholic and rival pagan traditions. Since the Catholic Church must of necessity be entirely unique and original, any similar religious practices must be demonic copies. The Devil's wily handiwork knows no geographic boundaries of course, and thus He can coerce the credulous Tibetans to express their devotion towards their pseudo-pontiff, the Dalai Lama. Through this strategy, the Christian missionaries were able to coopt the purity of origins and assign their Tibetan counterparts the corrupt state of the derivative. The Tibetan monk becomes most threatening to Catholic missionaries not when seen as utterly other, as a pagan idolater for instance, but when seen as too-much-like-us. Distance between the Tibetan monk and the Catholic missionary can be restored once the other is revealed to be demonic and derivative. Still, the demonic double of the Dalai Lama and of mocking monks unsettles the presence of the belated missionary in Tibet.[34]

The earliest Catholic missionaries were largely ignorant of any real (or imaginary) differences between Tibetan Buddhists and Bonpos.[35] Later Protestant missionaries and amateur Orientalists, including Jäschke and Das, were well aware of two distinct

religious traditions in Tibet. We have seen the invidious distinctions that they made between Buddhism and Tibet's native "pagan" tradition, distinctions that were reinforced by the binary categories and polemical labels used by the Tibetans themselves. During the Victorian period another development can be detected in the western descriptions and evaluations of Tibetan Buddhism and Bon. Protestant missionaries and travelers brought into Tibet a certain amount of polemical baggage from home directed against Catholicism. In particular, the pure "true religion" of Protestantism was contrasted with the "pagano-papism" of Roman Catholicism, understood to be a complex of magic, fear, the deification of the dead, and the worship of objects in the forms of icons, statues or relics. What seems ironic, in light of Smith's observation from "In Comparison a Magic Dwells," is how Victorian scholars projected and transposed into Tibet their critique of Roman Catholic magic and superstition, which they found lying at the very core of Bon and lurking in "Lamaism." Their imaginative juxtaposition of Catholic and Tibetan magic and idolatry, of popes and lamas, reveals the mark of their own magical thinking.

The Victorian scholar whose studies of Tibetan religion played a central role in the codification of "Lamaism" as a descriptive category for Tibetan Buddhism was L. Austine Waddell. A British functionary based in Sikkim for ten years, Waddell learned enough Tibetan to read some Buddhist texts, but he confesses that he could not make much sense of the Tantric texts and practices without the assistance of lamas, who were bound to oaths of secrecy. In the preface of his *The Buddhism of Tibet, or Lamaism* (1895), Waddell describes his ruse to gain the confidence of the local lamas of Sikkim, an act of "participant observation" that established his own ethnographic authority:

> Realizing the rigid secrecy maintained by the Lamas in regard to their seemingly chaotic rites and symbolism, I felt compelled to purchase a Lamaist temple with its fittings; and prevailed on the officiating priests to explain to me in full detail the symbolism and the rites as they proceeded. Perceiving how much I was interested, the Lamas were so obliging as to interpret in my favour a prophetic account which exists in their scriptures regarding a Buddhist incarnation in the West. They convinced themselves

> that I was a reflex of the Western Buddha, Amitābha, and thus they overcame their conscientious scruples, and imparted information freely....Enjoying in these ways special facilities for penetrating the reserve of Tibetan ritual...I have elicited much information on Lamaist theory and practice which is altogether new.[36]

Waddell's strategy of gaining an insider's insight into Tibetan religion differs from that of S. C. Das and Kawaguchi, who both donned a disguise as pilgrims to gain access to Lhasa. Waddell instead remained outside Tibet and played the role of a lay patron by purchasing a Buddhist temple and gaining the lamas' confidence. Waddell's patronage was received by the lamas as the generous act of a pious western layman (*sbyin bdag*), and they apparently welcomed him as an emanation of Amitābha. Waddell felt no need to disabuse the lamas of their misunderstanding, for he believes that he has been accepted as a genuine "insider," not simply a western Buddhist but the Western Buddha Himself.

Viewed by the lamas as a Buddha, Waddell refuses to see his lama informants as true Buddhists. In his opinion, the religion they practice is such a corruption of what he considers the original teachings of the Buddha to be that it is best described as "Lamaism." He maintains an attitude of dismissive contempt towards Tibetan Buddhism and especially towards the "popish" lamas. Yet he also correctly points out that the term "Lamaism" is not used by the Tibetans themselves:

> The Lamas have no special term for their form of Buddhism. They simply call it "*The* religion" or "Buddha's religion;" and its professors are "Insiders," or "within the fold" (*nang-pa*), in contradistinction to the non-Buddhists or "Outsiders" (*chi-pa* or *pyi-'ling* [sic.]), the so-called "pe-ling" or foreigners of English writers. And the European term "Lamaism" finds no counterpart in Tibetan.[37]

Waddell's observation here reinforces his authority by displaying his knowledge of emic categories. His interpretation of the Insider/Outsider distinction is somewhat idiosyncratic, and perhaps self-serving. The Buddhists of Tibet do identify themselves as "Insiders" (*nang pa*) and non-Buddhists as "Outsiders" (*phyi pa*), but those usually designated as "Outsiders" by Buddhist polemicists are Hindu "heretics" (*mu stegs pa*) and the Bonpos, not the "so-called 'pe-ling' or foreigners of English writers." His gloss

suggests that Europeans are the usual targets of Tibetan Buddhists as "Outsiders." Such a characterization reinforces his own unique position of authority, as we have already learned that he, an Englishman, was accepted by the lamas as a Buddha, thus an Insider. What he fails to mention is that the Buddhists of Tibet were not the only ones to regard themselves as "Insiders." Bonpos also use this label for themselves, while their Buddhist rivals might be dismissed as Outsiders. Thus the Insider/Outsider distinction in Tibetan is more elusive than Waddell indicates, for its meaning depends entirely upon who assigns others as outsiders. One can imagine that a Bon monk in Sikkim might dismiss Waddell's position and his description of Tibetan religion as inaccurate and heretical, the work of an Outsider.

Waddell's understanding of Bon's impact on the formation of Tibetan Buddhism does help explain why he insists on using the neologism "Lamaism," despite it not being an emic term. He prefers "Lamaism" to "Tibetan Buddhism" because the Tibetans place their faith in Lamas, the sacerdotal priests whose "cults comprise much deep-rooted devil-worship and sorcery," and these practices are of Bon origin. "Lamaism," he states in his preface, "is only thinly and imperfectly varnished over with Buddhist symbolism, beneath which the sinister growth of poly-demonist superstition darkly appears."[38] Here Waddell introduces his own inside/outside distinction: once the critical historian strips away the thin surface of Lamaism (with its veneer of Buddhist symbolism) he reveals the dark depths of non-Buddhist superstitions, swollen to sinister proportions. Here we hear echoes of the demonic rhetoric used by Waddell's missionary predecessors, although he does not rely on the theory of demonic plagiarism to account for its sinister character. In his opinion, there are two primary sources for the demonic dimension lurking in Lamaism: it originates in part from the primitive paganism of Bon, and in part from Indian Tantrism. We need not review Waddell's historical account of how the rational and ethical teachings of the Buddha, free of all superstition and ritual, gradually degenerated in India with the development of Mahāyāna ritual, Yogācāra mysticism, and

debased Tantric demonolatry, all of which corrupted pure Buddhism in India before it even reached Tibet.[39] Our interest lies in his interpretation of Bon and its impact on Tibetan Buddhism, so we will pick up his historical narrative in the seventh century in Tibet, when Buddhism first came to Tibet.

Waddell paints in broad brushstrokes a dark and savage picture of pre-Buddhist Tibet, when Bon flourished:

> Tibet emerges from barbaric darkness only with the dawn of Buddhism, in the seventh century of our era.... Up till the seventh century Tibet was inaccessible even to the Chinese. The Tibetans of this prehistoric period are seen, from the few glimpses we have of them in Chinese history about the end of the sixth century, to have been rapacious savages and reputed cannibals, without a written language, and followers of an animistic and devil-dancing or Shamanist religion, the *Bön*, resembling in many ways the Taoism of China.[40]

This image of pre-Buddhist Tibet and Bon assumes a Chinese vantagepoint. Tibet is judged to be isolated, backward, and barbaric when seen from the perspective of the civilized Chinese. Waddell seems unaware or at least unconcerned with the possibility of ethnocentrism, or the Chinese propensity to view all of the peoples on their frontiers as barbarian savages. Even his comparison of Bon to Taoism follows an association that the Chinese were apt to make. His characterization of Bon as an "animistic and devil-dancing or Shamanist religion," however, reveals less debt to the Chinese (for whom none of these labels are familiar), than to contemporaries like Sarat Chandra Das. While Das introduced terms like "fetishism" and "demon worship" to describe Bon, only to replace them with the generic "Shamanism," Waddell uses "animistic" and "devil-dancing" in apposition to the Bon "Shamanist religion." None of these terms are ever explained or illustrated with any examples, for their function is less descriptive than evocative of barbarism. Bon "Shamanism" is shorn of any context, either historical or literary, for it is assumed to be static and lacking any literature. This proves to be an effective rhetorical

strategy because no interpretive questions arise. Bon Shamanism is treated as self-evident; nothing about it is problematic.

Much like Das and the Buddhist apologists before him, Waddell subscribes to an evolutionary model of Tibetan religious development. He ascribes a positive value to the introduction of Indian Buddhism to Tibet, a catalytic event that transformed Tibetan culture from an essentially barbaric state to a more civilized and humane one:

> The current of Buddhism which runs through its tangled paganism has brought to the Tibetan most of the little civilization which he possesses, and has raised him correspondingly in the scale of humanity, lifting him above a life of wild rapine and selfishness, by setting before him higher aims, by giving milder meanings to his mythology, by discountenancing sacrifice, and by inculcating universal charity and tenderness to all living beings.[41]

This passage indicates Waddell's evolutionary theory of Tibetan religion. Indian Buddhism bears the light of civilization to Tibet, while dark and sinister shadows are cast by the native tradition of Bon, the source of the savage mythology and the barbaric sacrifices to which he refers, the religion that promoted the life of "wild rapine and selfishness." The shift Waddell describes from barbarism to civilization, from selfishness to compassion, and the discountenancing of bloody sacrifices, can be found in both Buddhist *and* Bon narratives about the impact of their own religion on Tibet, although Waddell seems under the spell of the Buddhist versions. I will briefly review some of the themes found in Buddhist narratives, hearkening back to the potent ideological images introduced in the previous chapter.

In the Tibetan Buddhist myths that address how and why Tibet converted to the true religion, we find a Buddhist *mission civilisatrice* expressed in moral and pragmatic terms: the country needed to be tamed, civilized, and in fact totally reconstructed, not simply set on the Buddhist path to enlightenment. Crucial to this project is the creation of a negative image of pre-Buddhist Tibet. It is depicted as an insignificant border region to India, paralyzed by the influence of dark demonic forces, its benighted human inhabitants living

in fear, lust, and lawlessness. According to these narratives, pre-Buddhist Tibet is the "land of the cruel ones" (*gdug pa can gyi yul*), a country "beyond the pale" (*mtha' 'khob*). The Tibetans themselves are depicted as stupid and savage, with an innate propensity for violence and a thirst for bloody sacrifices as "red-faced flesh-eaters" (*sha za gdong dmar*).[42] This barbaric state of affairs in Tibet was destined to change upon the arrival of Buddhism, which introduced literacy, a legal system and moral code, a higher standard of living, as well as bringing Buddhist enlightenment to the land of darkness. Buddhist historical narratives tell how Tibet was providentially civilized by Mahāyāna, when it introduced new spiritual and practical techniques for cultivating the snowy land of Tibet, sowing the seeds of karma, merit, and enlightenment. Tibet's conversion to Buddhism is represented not merely as a "spiritual" event but as a cultural revolution, impacting everything from law and politics, morality and native intelligence. All of these things were of a piece, resulting in the complete reformation of Tibet from a backward, barbaric place to a civilized nation under the rule of enlightened kings.

While Waddell's theory of religious evolution in Tibet may mirror Buddhist narratives, his version of "pure" Buddhism departs significantly from the standards of orthodoxy accepted by Tibetan Buddhists. Whereas Tibetan Buddhists maintain the conceit of having inherited Indian Buddhism in all of its richness, culminating in the sophisticated practices of the Vajrayāna, Waddell disparages Tantra as a degeneration from the pure message supposedly taught by Śākyamuni, a teaching that promoted morality, reasoned insight, and agnostic idealism, free of all superstition, sacerdotalism, and sexual perversion. Waddell's Orientalist assessment of Tibetan religions is in no way taken whole cloth from Buddhist apologists, attached as it is to Protestant polemics against the "Catholic" elements in Tibetan Buddhism. He regards the Lamas not as genuine Buddhist monks but as priests (crypto-Catholics), who play upon the credulity and fear of Tibetan lay people by promising them relief from demons if they support the priests' performance of exorcism rituals:

> A notable feature of Lamaism throughout all of its sects, and decidedly un-Buddhist, is that the Lama is a priest rather than a monk. He assigns himself an indispensable place in the religion and has coined the current saying "Without a Lama in from there is no (approach to) God." He performs sacerdotal functions on every possible occasion; and a large proportion of the order is almost entirely engaged in this work. And such services are in much demand; for the people are in hopeless bondage to the demons, and not altogether unwilling slaves to their exacting worship.[43]

The sensitive reader today is struck by Waddell's sovereign confidence in being able to single out what is truly Buddhist, while dismissing his lama informants as un-Buddhist. For him, true Buddhism can only be found in the texts that record the words of the Buddha, not in the contemporary rituals of Tibetan Lamas, whose practices have become so corrupt and distant from noble Śākyamuni's original teachings.[44]

Waddell's attitude of dismissive contempt towards his Tibetan informants is not unknown among scholars today. Sometimes the disdainful scholar is a Tibetan Buddhist. The controversial Buddhist teacher Chogyam Trungpa wrote an imperious article in 1978 surveying Bon, wherein he describes in familiar fashion how the Bonpos adopted and adapted Buddhist ideas. In doing so, Trungpa claims that the Bonpos diluted and even forgot their own unique teachings and practices. It is pointless, Trungpa asserts, to ask a contemporary Bonpo about pre-Buddhist Bon beliefs, since he is only familiar with the hodge-podge of Buddhist-Bon ideas found in these late texts.[45] For Trungpa (as for Waddell), the contemporary Tibetan informants who call themselves "Bonpos" are really "outsiders" with regard to the origins of their own tradition.

After Waddell published his study of Lamaism in 1895, the next scholar to write a survey of Tibetan religion was Charles Bell in 1931 with *The Religion of Tibet*. Like Waddell, Bell was a British colonial administrator and member of the Indian Civil Service, who in 1901 was transferred to Sikkim, where he began his lifelong relationship with Tibet. His career culminated when he became the British Representative in a diplomatic mission to Tibet. Unlike earlier travelers to Tibet like Das or Kawaguchi, who

donned a disguise in order to enter Lhasa secretly, Bell went to Tibet as an invited guest and personal friend of the Dalai Lama. His presentation of Tibetan culture and Buddhism is generally more sympathetic than that of his predecessors. He gained access to a large number of Tibetan historical sources, and his discussion of Tibet's history makes generous reference to them.

Bell does not cite any Bon histories in *The Religion of Tibet*, however, and his interpretation and evaluation of Bon has much in common with his predecessors. Here is how he introduces "the old faith" of Bon:

> Before Buddhism came to Tibet, the religion of the people, known to themselves as Pön, appears to have been a form of Shamanism or Nature worship. It is over a thousand years since Buddhism established itself, and it is therefore difficult to give direct influence as to the form which Shamanism assumed in Tibet. The Tibetan histories pay but little attention to the pre-Buddhist period, regarding it as unworthy of serious attention. Such few references as there are show a belief in spirits of earth and sky, spirits good and bad, the worshipping of the former, and the propitiation of the latter. Magical tambourines were among the necessary equipment of a professor or priest of this religion, enabling him to travel in the sky.[46]

Bell's use of Shamanism here is placed in conjunction with "nature worship," another term used in evolutionary theories of religion to describe the most primitive stage of belief. made popular by Max Müller. Bell is well aware of the scant evidence that survives about Bon, and he suggests that the rise of Buddhism eclipsed the original religion. Compared to earlier descriptions, Bell's characterization of Bon is more specific, mentioning the belief in spirits, their propitiation and veneration; later he adds that some other features of Bon include the exorcism of demons who bring sickness, as well as animal and human sacrifice.[47] Most notably, Bell mentions the "magical tambourine" used to fly in the sky, and we will see how this drum (*phyed rnga*) becomes the symbol most often singled out in identifying a Bon shaman, especially in the taxonomies created by phenomenologists of religion.

Bell does not limit his characterization of Bon to ritual practices as described in ancient Tibetan and Chinese sources. He also believes that one can gain some insight into ancient Bon by examining the primitive practices found in tribal regions bordering contemporary Tibet, especially in the eastern Himalaya and western China, among the Lepchas, Limbu, the Lolo, Lissu, and Moso tribes. "It is probable that in those rites we have to this day a survival of the Pönist religion but little changed from its life in Tibet two thousand years ago."[48] Bell's suggestion here, that Bon can be found still practiced on the margins of Tibet, among the primitive tribal peoples, was accepted by many of his contemporaries and by later Tibetologists.[49] Even today many anthropologists continue to study shamans in the Himalayan regions bordering Tibet with the ethnohistorical purpose of reconstructing Tibet's pre-Buddhist religion.

The notion that the study of contemporary "primitive" societies will offer insights into the religious orientation of archaic or prehistoric societies was first formulated by Edward Tylor. Most famous for his evolutionary theory of religion that plotted human progress from savagery to civilization, Tylor noted that even today's civilized peoples retain vestiges of the most primitive religious attitudes, such as the animistic belief that the world is pervaded by spiritual beings. Tylor developed his "doctrine of survivals" to account for the persistence of archaic ideas in the present, although he offers little explanation for why the "survivals" have, in fact, survived.[50] The best place to look for these relics of a more primitive age and mental condition would be in the simple tribal societies located on the periphery of the modern civilized world. Tylor's theory of "survivals" informs not only Bell's claim that primitive Bon can be found among Himalayan tribal regions, but it survives too in the work of contemporary anthropologists.

It is easy to smile somewhat condescendingly at the missionaries and pioneering Tibetologists, who worried so much about idolatry and demonic plagiarism, and who subscribed to evolutionary theories of Tibetan religion that today seem so *outdated*. There is an implicit teleology lying behind the scholar's smile of superiority, for it arises

from the assumption that we are no longer subject to the biases and naivete that afflicted earlier scholarship. Today, of course, scholars are dubious about the quest for the origins of religion, and evolutionary theories of religious development have fallen out of favor. When reviewing the work of earlier Tibetologists, it is tempting to distance ourselves from that past, and to protest that *we don't do that sort of thing now*. Yet despite our discomfort with evolutionary models of religion, we have hardly abandoned the conviction that the field of Buddhist and Tibetan studies must advance beyond the errors of the past. By denying the formative influence of past scholarship on the present, we blind ourselves to the historicity of our disciplinary formation, including the constitution of "Bon" as a research subject. The denial of our own on-going entanglement with issues debated and discussed by past scholars results from a fantasy that, once the past has been denied, we are now located "on the clean slate of the present, where there is nothing but 'the real data' to confound us."[51] This fantasy continues to motivate some scholars of Bon literature today, who distance themselves from earlier students of Tibet, whether for their armchair scholarship, or their Buddhist biases, or their ignorance of canonical Bon literature. By disavowing past scholarship, these philologists place themselves on the *tabula rasa* of the present, where their task is to provide a more historically accurate etymology of the terms found in Bon texts, including "Bon" itself. What remains dubious about this approach is the assumption that the scholar can retrieve the history of Bon or Buddhism from primary sources alone.

The pioneering scholars of Buddhism and Bon introduced a number of comparative strategies and historical models that were used by later scholars. For instance, there is a common tendency to shift from analogical comparisons (Bon is like central Asian shamanism, or Tantric Buddhism) to a theory of causality or genealogy (shamanism or Buddhism is the source of Bon). The genealogical model of comparison always establishes a relation of dependence or borrowing, with one religion serving as the more prestigious and pure source, while Bon is consistently designated the later "mixed"

tradition. Too, the pioneers that we have reviewed relied on binary categories to distinguish "original" Bon from Buddhism that prove long lasting. These binary distinctions include the association of Buddhism/Bon with adjectives like active/passive, developmental/static, light/dark, and ethical/barbaric. These binarisms derive in part from Buddhist apologetic literature, as well as from a distinction introduced in nineteenth century scholarship between "ethical" and "natural" religion.[52]

It is striking, for instance, how many of the pioneering scholars claimed that the most important contribution of Buddhism to Tibet was the ethical doctrine of karma, described as "you reap what you sow."[53] Buddhism civilizes and uplifts the Tibetans because it introduces them to a noble soteriology, ethical teachings based on karma and "charity," and virtues such as tolerance and gentleness. Moreover, it is a missionary religion based upon the dissemination of sacred texts, with a proselytizing ethic and universal orientation that is familiar to western scholars steeped in Christianity. Bon, on the other hand, was represented as strange and sinister. Its shamanism served as the demonic other, the religious matrix of the Tibetan natives. When Indian Buddhism crossed the high Himalayan threshold in the seventh century it penetrated the Bon matrix of Tibet, and the product of their intermingling was a bastard child these scholars identified as "Lamaism." Lurking behind the image of Lamaism as a degenerate and corrupted form of Buddhism lies Bon shamanism. Everything about Lamaism that seemed frightening and demonic, antithetical to "pure" Buddhism, was identified as the enduring legacy of primitive Bon. In this historical narrative, Bon shamanism serves the purpose of establishing temporal and cultural distance from the pure origins of Indian Buddhism, marking Bon as the sinister other that is indigenous to Tibet.

Shamanism Afloat A Sea of Family Resemblances

In the 1950s, shamanism acquired a distinctly different meaning when used by Mircea Eliade, Réne de Nebesky-Wojkowitz, and Helmut Hoffmann to describe Tibetan religion, and Bon in particular. In their work, we see a new approach to shamanism emerge that is explicitly comparative, "scientific," and grounded in both ethnology and textual study. These authors are all schooled in the phenomenology of religion, and this influence is apparent in their effort to catalogue systematically the typical features of shamanism, in their preoccupation with its morphology. For them, the original form of shamanism is to be found in the hunting cultures of North and Central Asia, but pre-Buddhist Bon constitutes the national Tibetan form. All agree that shamanism is found among hunting peoples, which accounts for the sacrality of bones, feathers, weapons, and blood in shamanic rituals. These features are described with much more detachment than their predecessors. As good phenomenologists striving for *epochê*, they manage to avoid much of the barbaric rhetoric and lurid labels that were commonly used by their predecessors to describe Bon shamans as devil-dancing sorcerers of a sinister sort. Despite their best intentions to bracket their own judgments about the truth or falsehood of the shaman's vocation and experiences, their evaluations of shamanism and Bon become apparent. When conflicts between Bon shamans and Tibetan Buddhists are discussed, the representations of the Bonpo are inevitably drawn from Buddhist apologetic sources. The Bonpos come off as the historical losers in their confrontation with their more sophisticated opponents, forced to the margins of Tibetan religious development, or assimilated into "Lamaism."

What all three scholars display as phenomenologists is an interest in classifying shamanic phenomena systematically, with numerous comparisons drawn to the shamanism of North and Central Asia. There is a noticeable shift away from simply labeling the primordium of Tibetan religion as "shamanism," towards interpreting this

term as a constellation of ingredients that manifest interrelated patterns. Once these shamanic elements are identified and placed in some meaningful order, these scholars shift to an analysis of the shaman's function in society, his religious and healing role. Their identification of Tibetan shamanism is not limited to Bon, for they find shamanic elements surviving in the practices of Lamaism. Their approach reveals a tendency to decontextualize contemporary Bon and Buddhist practices and see them as remnants of something more primary, an archaic substrate of shamanism. How each scholar evaluates the substrate varies.

The single most influential study of shamanism is Eliade's *Shamanism: Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy*, first published in 1951. Although not a Tibetologist, Eliade's role in defining shamanism and identifying its essential features plays a formative role for these and subsequent scholars of Tibetan religions. At the very outset of his sweeping study, he offers an essential definition of shamanism; however, his conception expands as the work progresses to include a broad range of functions and symbolic motifs, until the phenomena become truly ubiquitous. According to his definition, the single most essential element involves the shaman's ecstatic experience: "the shaman specializes in a trance during which his soul is believed to leave the body and ascend to the sky or descend to the underworld."[54] Ecstatic soul travel enables the shaman to establish a relationship with a celestial being. Eliade claims that the shaman's interaction with a Supreme Being residing in the heavens was the original underlying ideology of shamanism. This ideology is based on the ecstatic experience of soul flight, an experience that he sharply distinguishes from spirit possession, when deities are persuaded to descend into a medium's body. It is his controversial judgment that spirit possession is a later degenerate development, and not properly shamanic at all.[55]

The shaman's ability to abandon his body and roam to the spirit world enables him to serve as a healer, when he combats evil spirits who are responsible for causing illness among ordinary folk, and to function as a psychopomp, who guides the souls of

the recently deceased to the netherworld. In addition to describing the various social roles of the shaman, Eliade broadens his conception even further when he identifies certain symbols as archetypical "shamanic motifs." These include the shaman's exotic paraphernalia, his feathered costume, the tools of his trade (e.g. the drum), as well as more abstract features like the odd numbers commonly appearing in cosmological classificatory schemas. Eliade insists that all of these shamanic symbols are integrated in a religious microcosm, and their intrinsic meaning remains unaffected by their changing roles in different traditions. In constructing this ideal type, Eliade turns the shaman into a timeless mystery, almost a metaphysical being who soars effortlessly across cultural boundaries, transcending historical particularities. By applying such loose criteria to a myriad different phenomenon, he finds shamans and shamanic elements everywhere, Tibet included. For Tibetologists like Hoffmann and Nebesky-Wojkkowitz too, there is a great deal of excitement in discovering the shaman in his Bon incarnation, or in his Lamaist disguise.

There is striking agreement among Eliade, Nebesky-Wojkowitz, and Hoffmann in what constitutes shamanism and where its manifestations might be found in Tibetan religions. Their consensus is no coincidence, for they were all familiar with each other's research, as evidenced from their mutual referencing in their citations. All agree that the classic example of a Bonpo practicing shamanic flight occurs in the tournament of magic at Mount Kailash between Milarepa and a Bonpo; Naro Bon chung flies to the summit mounted on a drum and wearing a blue cape, just like the shamans of central Asia.[56] Other instances of the flight of Bon magicians are declared shamanic, as well as their healing rituals recalling lost souls (*bla khyer*), their reliance on thread crosses (*mdo*) as "spirit traps," and their use of effigies (*glud*) during exorcism rituals. The effigies are understood to be a substitute for the bloody animal sacrifices that were originally practiced in pre-Buddhist Tibet. The early Bon priests who presided over the funerary rites for the Tibetan kings are also viewed as psychopomps. Eliade and Hoffmann concur

that there is plenty of evidence for the "supreme being ideology" in the Bonpos' preoccupation with heaven, and in the early kings' celestial descent and ascent via the sacred rope (*dmu thag*). However, both Hoffmann and Nebesky-Wojkowitz depart from Eliade's conception of what is properly shamanic when they consider examples of spirit possession, the Tibetan mediums and oracles (*lha 'babs*) that they believe emerged from ancient Bon.

In a chapter from his classic study, Eliade protests that "it would be chimerical to attempt in a few pages to list all the other shamanic motifs present in Bon-po myths and rituals and persisting in Indo-Tibetan tantrism."[57] "Chimerical" though it may be, the remainder of his chapter attests to his interest in cataloguing a broad range of shamanic techniques and symbols that originate in Bon and persist in Lamaism. These motifs range from the most abstract elements found in their cosmologies to mundane materials like fur and feathers, or the mirrors and drums used by Bon and Buddhist ritual specialists. Nebesky-Wojkowitz and Hoffmann are no less zealous in revealing shamanic motifs and listing them in encyclopedic fashion. All three scholars agree that the pre-Buddhist cosmology, which divided the world into three cosmic realms (heaven, earth, and underworld, each presided over by a particular class of spirit), is shamanic in origin, especially when ritual specialists are believed able to transport themselves and communicate between the realms. Furthermore, the penchant for odd numbers (especially 7, 9, and 13) found in Bon texts for classifying groups of deities and texts is cited as a shamanic motif, since these "mystical" numbers are frequently used by Siberian and Mongolian tribes too.[58] These numerological parallels between Bonpos and central Asian shamans may seem to us entirely superficial, if not misplaced. However, we must remember that it was only natural for these scholars trained in comparative phenomenology to search for (and find) structural similarities between the little known pre-Buddhist religion of Tibet and the neighboring shamanism of central Asia.

By far the most frequently cited examples of shamanic motifs focus on the apparel worn by Bonpos, as presented in literary descriptions. Their cataloguing of shamanic symbols pays particular attention to the exotic accouterments and costumes of Bon priests. The paraphernalia include the tambourine drum (*phyed rnga*) and the mirror (*me long*), the thread crosses (*mdo*) used as spirit traps, the use of felt mats (*phying stan*), arrows (*mda' dar*), daggers (*phur bu*), and swords (*gri*); the costumes feature feathered coats (*stod le*), felt hats (*phying zhva*), and blue capes (*sham thabs ngon po*)—all of which seem to them to be nearly identical in appearance and function to those worn by Siberian, Altaic, Buriat, or Mongolian shamans.[59] These materials, the dramatic emblems of power, add considerable weight and solidity to their identification of Bon shamanism that is otherwise missing in their flights of fancy about "mystical" odd numbers. Yet it is important to realize that for these scholars the mundane materials are not as earthly as they seem at first sight. Their value for Eliade and others lies in their abstract religious meaning; they are regarded as cosmic symbols that disclose "hierophanies" of the sacred, and patterns of "metapsychic itineraries."[60] It is assumed that the ancient Bonpo priest understood, perhaps intuitively, the authentic sacred reality (the "depth of meaning") in the symbolism of his costume. Furthermore, as these shamanic symbols and forms have genuine ontological status for Eliade, they cannot be destroyed or lost, only mutilated or camouflaged when assimilated into later Lamaist rituals. This form of interpretation leads to a dehistoricized perspective on Tibetan shamanism as an abstract type, an ideal type that was manifest most purely in the distant past.

The fascination with the theatrical costume and equipment of the Bon priest is not limited to western historians of religion and anthropologists, however. Bon historical texts also describe the foreign origins of the priest's "wild" (*rgod*) costume and ritual paraphernalia, although there is little or no interest in interpreting their symbolic significance. According to their historical perspective, most of the exotic materials were offered to the Bon priests as decorations of honor by Tibetan kings during the pre-Buddhist

period. Bon histories present an idealized image of pre-Buddhist Tibet, when Bon flourished and Bon priests served as the royal "bodyguards" (*sku srung gi gshen*), who protected the kings and offered them sage political advice. A stock phrase repeated in many Bon historical texts sums up this idyllic golden age, when Tibet was under Bon rule:

> At that time, the Tibetan kingdom was the land of Bon; the kings were great, the priests were dignified, laws were strict, and the subjects were happy. In Zhang zhung and Tibet as kings were gods, human beings were well protected. As the priests served as royal bodyguards, the kings were able to live long. As they lived mainly in virtue, they were happy in all their rebirths. As the divine rope hung from heaven, the ladder for ascending [to the heavens] was solid. As they invoked undefiled gods, they received protection from them. As the ministers were wise in their counsel, the government was stable: the activities of the unified religio-political system spread and flourished.[61]

The texts add that the Tibetan kings patronized Bon monks, and they especially revered the Bon priests and yogins who possessed supernatural powers. In recognition of their superior spiritual status, the kings paid homage to the Bon priests in three ways, in honor of their body, speech, and mind. Most important for our purposes were the crowns and clothes given by the king to his Bon priests as signs of respect for their body (*sku la gtsigs byin*):

> Their strands of hair were tied in a topknot and left uncut. In their white silk turbans were stuck tufts of eagle feathers, the king of birds. They wore a golden bird horn crown and a turquoise forehead ornament. They dressed in a cloak of white lynx and jackal fur. They were given tiger, leopard and caracal paws, and aprons made of white lion fur, and a pair of silken shoes with silver laces.[62]

While Eliade would surely see the bird horns and feathers as ornithological symbols that recall shamanic flight, while the white fur resembles the costume of the Buriat shaman, Bon texts present these materials as royal rewards for the priest's magical power and counsel.[63]

One Bon history, *The Collected Works on Eternal Bon* (*G.yung drung Bon gyi rgyud 'bum*) even offers an explanation of how the kings acquired such exotic emblems. According to this text, the Tibetan empire expanded significantly during the time when Bon flourished, well before the reign of Srong btsan sgam po, the king usually acknowledged as Tibet's empire builder. It records how the Tibetan kings would lead their armies on expeditions to the frontiers "to subdue the border regions" (*mtha' 'dul*). Each campaign proved successful, due in no small part to the assistance of Bon priests who performed various rituals, such as the ritual to suppress demonic enemies (*dgra sri phyogs gnan*). As a reward, the Tibetan kings decorated the bodies of their Bon priests with the booty and spoils from the defeated countries. From Nan-chao ('Jang), a Bon priest was decorated with three wild markers as insignia of rank (*yig tshang du rgod gsum*): a turquoise bird horn crown, a cloak of white eagle feathers, on which were attached tiger paws. After defeating China, the Tibetan king presented his helpful Bon priest with a white silk turban, and the text notes that "even now Bonpos wear turbans on their head as an everlasting sign." After Bhutan (Mon) was conquered with the help of ritual bombs (*btso*) prepared by a Bon priest, he was rewarded by the king with a cloak of tiger and leopard skin, and the author explains "this is the reason why the Bonpos wear tiger skin cloaks."[64]

The point of this narrative is clearly to present an etiology for the foreign-looking garments and gear that Bon ritual specialists wear and use even today on special ceremonial occasions. But the narrative also glorifies the mythic past, when Tibetan kings heeded their Bon priests, and "the king's power was generated by Bon" (*rje'i mnga' thang bon gyis skyed*). What is noteworthy about these narratives is that they present the Bon priests as political actors and ritual specialists, rather than as shamanic healers, psychopomps, or masters of ecstatic trance. Their power is represented as less "spiritual" than political, for it supports the centralized authority of the king and his goals of imperial expansion. The "wild" symbols are not "borrowed" by the Bon priests from

neighboring shamans, rather these neighbors are conquered and "tamed" by the powerful rituals of Bon priests working on behalf of a centralized imperial government, and their "wild" resources are appropriated. The bold display of these emblems is meant to embellish both the Tibetan king's and the Bon priest's power as a form of symbolic conquest and metonymic domination. Such a picture, however fantastic and mythical, does not fit well with the traditional representations of Bon "shamanism" by western scholars.[65]

With the arrival of Buddhism in Tibet, Tibetan histories agree that Buddhism and Bon came into conflict. According to Bon histories, once pro-Buddhist kings came into power, most notably Khri srong lde btsan, the Bonpos were horribly persecuted, being forcibly converted to Buddhism or sent into exile from Central Tibet. This forced assimilation or marginalization is only a temporary setback according to the Bon histories, for after a few generations the Bon "treasure texts" (*gter ma*) that had been hidden in the ground were rediscovered, and a Bon renaissance takes place. A somewhat similar scenario is imagined to occur in the narratives of western scholars. "Original" Bon is suppressed by Buddhism but it does not disappear altogether; for its shamanic elements went underground, as it were, to become the religious substratum of Tibet. How well shamanism survived there in the substratum, and what impact it had on Tibetan culture, was debated.

Although Eliade was not a historian of Tibetan religions, he hazards that "Lamaism has preserved the Bon shamanic tradition almost in its entirety. Even the most famous masters of Tibetan Buddhism are reputed to have performed cures and worked miracles in the purest tradition of shamanism."[66] He acknowledges that some of the esoteric practices found in "Lamaism" might have Indian Tantric roots, yet he insists that many of these practices are motivated by the shaman's pursuit of an ecstatic experience. Using the metaphors of surface and depth found so often in the analysis of Lamaism, he claims that if one peeled away the thin veneer of Buddhist theology and symbolism in

many Lamaist rituals, such as the dismemberment rites (*gcod*), skeleton dances (*'cham*) and visits to Buddhist hells (*'das log*), one will find underneath the "soul" of archaic shamanism, with its initiation rites, ecstatic techniques, and psychopomp function. While these shamanic practices and symbols have been reinterpreted to fit into a Buddhist theological framework, and thus redirected away from goals that are properly ecstatic, Eliade insists that Bon shamanism somehow remains preserved in Lamaism. In his own theological argument, he makes the problematic claim that the normative Buddhist doctrine of no-self (*anātman*) presented a serious challenge to the realistic doctrine of the soul that is essential to shamanism, yet he sees the archaic shamanic spirit surviving in Lamaism, animating many of its rituals.[67] It is as if the essence of shamanism, its very soul, anchors the transhistorical category for Eliade, bringing it back to earth. Without it "shamanism" might float free as a signifier into space, like the limbs of a body disassembled in the Tibetan ritual of *gcod.* The archaic Bon substratum preserves more than distant memories of shamanism, for in certain remote areas of Tibet shamanism still flourishes openly, and Eliade considers that to be evidence for the genuine spiritual value of these archaic practices.[68]

While Nebesky-Wojkowitz might balk at Eliade's romantic vision of Lamaism being animated by archaic shamanism, he agrees that Lamaism contains various traditions that are survivals of early Bon shamanism:

> The exceedingly numerous class of protective divinities comprises many figures who originally belonged to the pantheon of the old Tibetan Bon faith. A study of the Tibetan protective deities and their cult, apart from giving an insight into a little known aspect of Lamaism, reveals new facts regarding the beliefs of pre-Buddhist Tibet and their relation to the early shamanistic stratum out of which the Bon religion developed.[69]

For him, original Bon can be reconstructed by considering all the weird and overlooked magical practices of Lamaism, including the cult of terrifying protective deities such as Dorje Shugden (Rdo rje shugs ldan), and realizing that they too derived from the ancient shamanic substratum. Much of his ethnographic and textual research is oriented towards

reconstructing these elements, in addition to demystifying the shaman's ecstatic techniques.

There is a marked ambivalence about Nebesky-Wojkowitz's research on Tibetan shamanism. His scholarship combines scientific disclosure about the esoteric techniques and tricks used by ritual specialists, with the coyness of the historian who is stripping off the veil of time from ancient secrets, seen for instance in his descriptions of the shamanic "séance." His scientific interest in explaining the oracle medium's trance reveals some of the pharmacological techniques used to induce the trance state, ranging from the inhalation of juniper smoke to the secret ingestion of hashish and Guinea pepper. His own suspicions about the authenticity of the oracle's trance state remain unvoiced, but instead he lets us know of well-educated Tibetan skeptics who regard the oracles "if not as impostors, then at least as strange pathological cases."[70] Ironically, his study has attained a certain dark occult status among some well-educated Tibetans today. The author's sudden untimely death, shortly after the book's completion, was thought to have been brought about by Tibet's protective deities, who were avenging his efforts to reveal their secrets and magic power. At the Library of Tibetan Works and Archives in Dharamsala, when I tried to check out Nebesky-Wojkowitz's text for my research, I discovered that it was not on the shelf with most other books but kept separate under lock and key. Only after offering the Tibetan librarian my American passport as collateral was I permitted access to the work, although not before being warned of its dangerous content.[71]

Nebesky-Wojkowitz's contemporary, Helmut Hoffmann, also presents himself as a historian who is lifting the veil of secrecy from Tibet and its history. At the very outset of *The Religions of Tibet* Hoffmann disparages "the tremendously swollen romantic literature" that has been written by earlier travelers and scholars, "much of it of very doubtful value, and including the curious dissertations of eccentric followers of mysticism and occultism." Contributing to this mysterious and mystified image of Tibet was the country's "hermetic isolation," its geographic and political inaccessibility. This

mythical image is problematic, of course, because it made Tibet appear as if it lacked any "real history." After explaining why the mystical image of Tibet is mistaken, thereby clearing a space for the historian to reconstruct the real Tibet, Hoffmann declares that only recently have a few Western scholars been able to reveal a truly historical picture of Tibetan religion, one that is scientific and comparative:

> Tibet can no longer be regarded as without history. The veil of secrecy is gradually being raised, and we shall come to know more and more about this strange world from within, to understand it in accordance with its own laws of development, and be able to find its place in the total history of Asia major, together with the newly-discovered civilizations along the edge of the Tarim Basin.[72]

For Hoffmann, understanding "this strange world from within" means that Tibetan culture and history should be accessed through Tibetan literature. Indeed, one of his strengths as a philologist and textual scholar is that he used a broad range of Tibetan sources in his survey of Buddhism and Bon. Still, much like his predecessors, his presentation of Bon favors Buddhist apologetic and polemical sources, with *The Crystal Mirror of Doctrinal Systems* featured prominently in his historical narrative about Bon's development. Hoffmann does not simply reiterate the tri-fold schema of Bon's development found in the CMDS. He also explains its "own law of development" by using western models of religious evolution and diffusion, always with the intent of explaining what is implicit in the "original" text. Finally, his analysis of Bon is explicitly comparative. He argues that early Bon corresponds quite simply to Central Asian shamanism, though its shamanic motifs are found throughout Asia major, while the second phase of Bon reveals many foreign influences from India and Persia. Since we have seen all of this before, it might seem that the "veil of secrecy" lifted by Hoffmann will disclose only more of the same clichés about Bon shamanism. Yet his views on Bon are often unusual and even startling, and they manifest his biases quite clearly.

Hoffmann identifies two main forces in the formation of Tibetan religious culture: the dominant force of Indian Buddhism, and the indigenous Tibetan worldview of Bon,

"which, though outwardly defeated, has nevertheless filled all the spiritual and psychological channels of the country's national life." One may well wonder what exactly this "autochthonous" Tibetan tradition entails, since Hoffmann traces everything about it that is recognizable elsewhere in Asia major. Leaving aside what "autochthonous" might mean, let us see how he distinguishes between the impact of these two forces on Tibet, and how he identifies ancient Bon in particular:

> The internal situation of Tibet may be said to turn on a polar reaction between a luminous, dynamic, fructifying and historical element on the one hand, and a sombre, static, and fundamentally unhistorical element—the ancient Tibetan religion—on the other. The origin of the word 'Bon' to describe it is lost in the past, and it is not readily definable, but in all probability once referred to the conjuring of the gods by magic formulas.... Until quite recently, we knew very little about this old Bon religion. Today we are in a position to say with some certainty that the original Bon religion was the national form of that old animist-shamanist religion which at one time was widespread not only in Siberia, but throughout the whole of Inner Asia, East and West Turkestan, Mongolia, Manchuria, the Tibetan plateaux and even China....Comparative religious historical study of the present-day Shamanist tribes of Siberia, and of the old Turkish, Mongolian and Tungusan peoples of Inner Asia (before the advent of missionary activities) ... promises to afford us valuable assistance in our efforts to understand the autochthonous beliefs of Ancient Tibet.[73]

Hoffmann's differentiation between Buddhist and Bon cultural forces, reminiscent of Lévi-Strauss' binary opposition between "hot" and "cold" societies, clearly denies temporal coevalness between Buddhism and Bon. It also raises questions about how two opposing forces could ever interact or coexist, for it makes Tibetan culture appear somewhat schizophrenic. We might ask why he designates Buddhism as the "luminous, dynamic, fructifying and historical" force, while Bon is "sombre, static, and fundamentally unhistorical." As a missionary religion that traveled across national boundaries, Buddhism parallels the historical tradition of Christianity; Buddhism is also viewed as a classic literary tradition, with an ethical orientation and philosophical corpus that enables the educated Buddhist to evolve to greater spirtual depths and achieve higher

levels of doctrinal sophistication. "Original" Bon, on the other hand, is represented as the non-literate native tradition, the national religion that remains stuck in the mire of animistic beliefs and shamanic rituals. Like Waddell and many others sympathetic to some form of "pure" Buddhism, Hoffmann views Buddhism as a bridge between Tibet's primitive origins and the post-Enlightenment worldview of the Europeans. Once Buddhism is adopted as the national religion, Tibetan civilization advances along the Buddhist path; but Bon becomes nothing more than a "moribund side channel of Tibetan cultural history—one capable of providing us with interesting indications with regard to the past, but not one which played any further role in shaping the life of the nation."[74] Such an evaluation is sharply at odds with Eliade's romantic view of Bon shamanism as an active spiritual force animating contemporary Tibetan Buddhist practices.

Hoffmann's suggestion that the study of contemporary Siberian shamanism will shed light on Tibet's ancient native tradition is reminiscent of Tylor's "survival" theory, but with an added comparative component. Like Eliade and Nebesky-Wojkowitz, he finds it remarkable that some Bon priests are depicted with ornate headdresses, blue robes, fur cloaks, and drums, all of which make up the paraphernalia of Siberian shamans.[75] Hoffmann would no doubt seek to support his diffusionist theory in the accounts of the foreign origins of the wild costume and paraphernalia described earlier in the Bon histories. However, it would be a mistake to accept these Bon etiological narratives as accurate historical records. There is simply no evidence from Tibet (aside from these Bon apologetic works) or from neighboring territories to corroborate Tibetan imperial expansion under the early kings and their Bon priests. Moreover, the Bon etiological narratives present the magical powers and ritual prowess of the priests as prior to the headdresses, bird horn crowns, and fur and feathered cloaks offered as gifts by the king to honor his priests. There does not appear to be any link in the Bon texts between the costumes and the Tibetan subjugation of foreign "shamans." The foreigners are simply described as demons on the frontier who need to be "suppressed" and "tamed," a

common Tibetan euphemism for defeating one's enemies and converting them to the true religion.

With the death of king Gri gum, Bon is said to undergo a major transformation. It becomes preoccupied with funerary rites, for which Hoffmann offers a diffusionist explanation following the narrative found in Thu'u bkvan's CMDS. Hoffmann tells how funerary rituals were introduced from Kashmir (Kha che), Gilgit (Bru sha) and Guge (Zhang zhung), along with divination and magical practices. He also notes the syncretic character of this stage of Bon, adding Tantric, Gnostic, and Manichaean influences to Thu'u bkvan's theory of Śaivite influence. His diffusionism become most pronounced in his theory of Manichean influences on "primitive" Bon. "The Bon religion seems to have been a rather primitive animism, but by the time Zhang zhung was incorporated into the new Tibetan empire the religion must have undergone certain changes connected with the adoption of ideas from Iran... This is not surprising since the western Himalayan districts were at all times open to the neighboring Iranian peoples."[76] Many of the "Manichean" dualisms that one finds in Hoffmann's work (good/evil, white/black, sacred/demonic) have their parallels in the insider/outsider distinctions that are indigenous to Tibetan polemical literature, although they are also compounded by Orientalist binarisms.

Hoffmann claims that the early Bon tradition was transformed yet again once it came into contact with Buddhism. However, these transformations (*bsgyur*) were merely in imitation of the superior Buddhist doctrines and practices, a process that Hoffmann describes with the rhetoric of the demonic:

> Just as the medieval Satanist desecrated the Host, so the Bon-po turned their sacred objects not in a dextral but in a sinister fashion. For example, the points of their holy sign the swastika did not turn dextrally as that of Lamaism do, but sinistrally, to left instead of to right. The Bon religion had become ossified as a heresy, and its essence lay largely in contradiction and negation.[77]

In language strikingly similar to that used by Christian theorists of demonic plagiarism, as well as by those European missionaries who first encountered Tibetan lamas as satanic

doubles, Hoffmann suggests that the entire thrust of Bon became heretical, a deliberate inversion and perversion of Buddha's pure teachings. Using this figure of reversal, Hoffmann translates the difference between Buddhists and Bonpos as anti-sameness. It is as if the Bon tradition were a concave carnival mirror whose grotesque distortions invert orthodox Buddhism, but in the process the High Tradition is also flattened out. Positioning himself as the righteous judge condemning Bon heresies, Hoffmann's harsh verdict is that "transformed" Bon became somewhat less primitive but more sinister. Even though the Bonpos were imitating a "luminous, dynamic, fructifying and historic" tradition, they ultimately never achieve full historicity themselves, becoming instead "ossified as a heresy." All of Hoffmann's judgments about Bon and its marginal position in Tibetan culture mirror that of the Buddhist polemicists, who place themselves at the center, as the legitimate and orthodox "insiders" in contrast with their heterodox Bon opponents.

Not surprisingly, later European scholars who collaborated with Tibetan Bonpo monks and scholars would come to dismiss Hoffmann's view of Bon as inadequate because of its Buddhist bias. In his survey of research on Bon, Per Kvaerne sums up Hoffmann's scholarship thus: "Hoffmann's work, originally fruitful, had become ossified and now represented a dead end."[78] Kvaerne's assessment sounds ironic in that he echoes Hoffmann's language in order to put him in his place. Hoffmann is recognized as the first scholar to explore the Bon tradition in any serious and systematic way, and his exploration of Bon based on Tibetan literature is said to be fruitful; yet the fact that he persisted in judging Bon as anti-Buddhist in essence led us down a blind alley. After the ancestor of Bonology is dutifully invoked and praised by Kvaerne, his later work is declared pleonastic, an ossified relic. Such an assessment anticipates a dramatic shift in the evaluation of Bon, one that is more sympathetic to interpreting Bon from its own historical and literary perspective, and that calls into question whether Bon is truly a form of shamanism. It is to this revisionist perspective on Bon that we shall now turn.

Exorcising the Shaman from Bon Studies

During the 1960s and 1970s, Tibetologists such as Rolf Stein, Giuseppe Tucci, David Snellgrove, and Per Kvaerne came to reassess Bon, which consequently lead to the rejection of the category of shamanism by most western scholars specializing in the study of Bon texts. How did such a radical reassessment come about? First, these scholars realized that they cannot follow the dualistic approach of Buddhist purists and regard Bon as Tibet's only other religion, containing all the leftover, marginal, and "superstitious" (*rnam rtog*) elements that do not belong their own elite tradition. In their surveys of Tibetan religion, both Stein and Tucci introduced a new category to describe the popular religion of Tibet. This religion, sometimes referred to in early Tibetan literature as *mi chos*, the "religion (or customs) of the people," is neither Buddhist nor Bon but is understood to be Tibet's indigenous tradition. Stein names this the "nameless religion,"[79] while Tucci calls it the "folk religion."[80] For both scholars it serves as the ancient religious substratum of Tibet: all that is not specifically Buddhist or Bon is relegated to this category. This religious substratum was reconstructed from two kinds of historical sources: the ancient Tibetan texts recovered from Dunhuang that had received little attention from earlier scholars, as well as later Bon and Buddhist sources. While we might expect a more precise picture of Bon to emerge, what is interesting about both of their surveys is that the problematic Bon tradition is dealt with last, after Buddhism (or "Lamaism") and the "folk" or "nameless" religion are carefully delineated. Despite the discovery of another popular religion in Tibet, and its displacement of Bon as the indigenous substratum, the boundaries between Buddhism, Bon and the folk (or "nameless") religion can hardly be fixed.

One of Stein's major contributions to the study of early Tibetan religion rests on his distinction between Bon and the substratum of the non-Buddhist folk tradition (*mi chos*), which he calls "the nameless tradition." Of course the very fact that Stein names

this latter "tradition" at all has important consequences for recognizing and validating it. But the dividing line between all three Tibetan religions can only be murky and obscure, as he remarks in his concluding comments about assimilated Bon:

> The beliefs of systematized and adapted Bon are consequently identical with Nyingma-pa doctrines, apart from names and technical terms. The rest of Bon merges to a large extent with the nameless religion discussed earlier. Is this because Bon by itself really represented that indigenous tradition, as is often thought? Or is it because the Bon sorcerers necessarily had to relate to and integrate with it? It is hard to tell, in absence of any specifically Bon *exposé* of their religion.[81]

These are questions that remain unanswered today, for no "specifically Bonpo *exposé*" has yet been revealed with the answers to all our questions about the boundaries between Bon, Buddhism, and Tibet's indigenous religion—nor will this likely ever happen. The very idea that such a "Bonpo *exposé*" exists rests on the assumption that there was once a discrete Bon tradition constituted in the distant past, prior to becoming all mixed up with either Buddhism or Tibetan popular religion.

Tucci also notes the difficulty of distinguishing between Buddhism, Bon, and the "folk religion," but he adds that Bon manifests distinct phases in its historical development, each in succession reflecting higher degrees of synthesis.

> If we are discussing the Bon religion only at the end of our account it is, among other things, because our preceding descriptions, especially of the folk religion, and of certain special aspects of Lamaism, have in some degree opened the way to understanding Bon. If we can disregard some short texts found in Central Asia, we can deduce that the pre-Buddhist religion of Tibet had to undergo a vast process of evolution to become able to compete with the incomparably more solid doctrinal structure of Buddhism.

When Tucci turns his attention to analyzing the development of the Bon tradition within the context of Tibet's social transformations, he relies entirely upon the "traditions that have come down to us" in the three-fold system of the *Crystal Mirror of Doctrinal Systems*.[82] Evidently it is the text's "handed down" or "given" quality (a crucial characteristic of all canonical texts) that keeps Tucci from critically interrogating its

content and categories (*'jol bon, 'khyar bon, 'gyur bon*). Reading Tucci's analysis of these phases produces an eerie feeling of déjà vu all over again.[83]

So what exactly is Bon for Stein and Tucci? Together they might answer that Bon includes both of the above (Buddhism and popular religion) and a little more. That is, they agree that Bon is syncretic, adopting and adapting Buddhist and popular religious themes. But what determines the unique identity of Bon is that it has its own canon, a system for classifying its "own" teachings, its own cosmogonies and theogonies, and a lineage stemming from its own founder. There is an important shift here towards recognizing the indigenous categories found in Bon literature as legitimate, or at least as legitimizing a distinct identity. Yet the brief resumes of Bon by Stein and Tucci are still quite indebted to Buddhist polemical literature. The CMDS in particular informs their presentation of how Bon "evolved" from a simple religion preoccupied with apotropaic rites, divination, and magic, to a state-supported religion featuring a royal mortuary cult, and finally to a religion with a sophisticated doctrinal "superstructure," lifted mostly from Buddhism, as well as from Kashmir Śaivism, Gnosticism, and Manicheanism.[84]

With the displacement of Bon as Tibet's non-Buddhist popular religion, there developed a much more critical attitude toward labeling Bon simply as a form of shamanism, especially as defined by Eliade and supported by the textual and ethnographic examples of Hoffmann and Nebesky-Wojkowitz. Stein and Tucci both found little evidence of the ecstatic trance state of the shaman in Bon rituals. Likewise, they found no support for the "supreme being ideology" that Eliade argued was so central to shamanism. Tucci explicitly rejected Hoffmann's claim that Bonpos believed exclusively in Heaven, personified as a celestial being and understood as a *deus otiosus*; thus Tucci denies that Bonpos ever subscribed to a version of the shamanic "supreme being ideology."[85] Too, Stein and Tucci recognize that many of the shamanic motifs singled out by earlier scholars are found in Indian Tantric literature, and they question whether these elements were historically disseminated into Tibet from central Asia, as

Hoffmann had suggested. Nonetheless, Tucci accepts that many of the shamanic motifs do appear in the ritual roles of early Bon priests, who were described as riding though the air, magically using their drums, and calling back the souls of the dead or dying.[86] Stein, on the other hand, remains more skeptical than Tucci about labeling such practices as shamanic, pointing out that the funerary and healing rites performed by Bon priests were concerned primarily with the details of ritual syntax, with no sign of the priests breaking out into any spontaneous ecstatic trance.[87] Stein also notes that the stereotypical description of the blue-caped, long-haired Bonpos flying through the air astride a drum may sound shamanic, but this drum riding feat is also found among Indian *siddhas*. Moreover, Tibetan Buddhist writers attribute blue capes and long hair to any "heretic," whether it be Bonpos, Śaivites, aberrant Tantrists, or those generally hostile to Buddhism.[88]

Snellgrove and Kvaerne continue this exacting critique of Bon "shamanism," mostly from the standpoint of textual specialists and philologists who argue that this western category does little to elucidate Bon literature and rituals. Their close reading of Bon texts paid less attention to the antagonistic voices of Buddhists and relied instead upon the cooperation of contemporary Bonpo scholars, who helped them understand these texts from "inside" Bon orthodoxy. Thus their revisionist representations of Bon coincided with their cooperation with Bonpo Geshes (*Dge bshes*), who knew nothing about the foreign category of "shamanism." Snellgrove must be recognized as the first western scholar to "discover" these Bonpo "treasures" (like a Tibetan *gter ston*). With the sponsorship of the Rockefeller Foundation he invited three Tibetan Bonpo monks to study at the University of London and collaborate with him on a translation of chapters from the Bon text, the *Gzi brjid*, which was published as *The Nine Ways of Bon*.

Snellgrove's action served to legitimize or "consecrate" the Bon tradition in at least three ways. First, *The Nine Ways of Bon* offered a systematic summary of genuinely "canonical" teachings (from the Bonpos' perspective) and its difficult technical

terminology was explained with the assistance of Bonpo scholar-monks. Second, when two of the Bonpo monks, Tenzin Namdak and Sangye Tenzin, returned to India they eventually established the first Bon monastery in exile at Dolanji, with the financial backing of western aid organizations. Tenzin Namdak and Sangye Tenzin, who became the chief teacher and the abbot respectively at this monastery, also initiated a publishing venture so that scores of Bon canonical works were published and disseminated to western libraries, such as the American university libraries designated as the repositories for India PL-480 texts. Third, the remaining Bonpo monk, Samten Karmay, stayed at the University of London to study under Snellgrove, and he became one of the pre-eminent scholars of Bon to write in both English and French. In 1972 Karmay published the first Bon history of Tibet in English, *The Treasury of Good Sayings*, followed by "A General Introduction to the History and Doctrines of Bon" in 1975, both of which superceded the superficial summary of Bon found in the CMDS.[89] As a result of Snellgrove's "discovery" then, and due to the industriousness of these Bonpo monk-scholars, the new historical picture of Bon that began to emerge in the west during the 1970s came much closer than any previous portrait to understanding Bon from within, thereby transforming Bonpos from mere objects being acted upon to actors in their own right.

Yet the revisionist picture of Bon that Snellgrove and Kvaerne produced was not very sympathetic to the claims made by Bonpos that their tradition was the authentic and original religion of Tibet, predating Buddhism. Rather, they regarded Bon as a heterodox form of Tibetan Buddhism that emerged only as a distinct constituted tradition in the eleventh century. Yet even then it was already syncretic, drawing upon the Buddhist and popular traditions of Tibet, as well as religious elements from other cultures (central Asian shamanism excepted). Snellgrove and Kvaerne dismissed as misdirected their predecessors' quest to recover a pure Bon prior to Buddhism. While Snellgrove notes the importance of gaining the Bonpos' own "insider's" perspective on their history and

literature, this becomes problematic in understanding pre-Buddhist Bon. He writes in his Introduction to *The Nine Ways of Bon*:

> In giving an account of any religion we cannot ignore what the practisers say about themselves....In the case of the *bonpos* we have to accept them and understand them as they are, while still trying to unravel the historical development of their religion. An understanding of them on their own terms is all the more important nowadays, because we need the assistance of their few remaining scholars in order to understand something of their early texts. Tibetans who can help with these texts are now very rare indeed. Educated *bonpo* monks are brought up in the *dGe lugs pa* ('Yellow Hat') Way, trained in conventional Buddhist philosophy and logic and receiving after examination by debate the academic degree of *dGe bshes*. They know their monastic liturgies and the names of their own *bonpo* gods, but very rarely indeed are they at all experienced in reading the sort of *bonpo* texts in which we most need assistance, namely material which represents 'pre-Buddhist' traditions. This lack of familiarity on the part of present-day *bonpos* with what Western scholars would regard as real *bon* material, may come as a disappointment.[90]

Snellgrove here identifies one of the challenges that a philologist or historian faces in working with well-educated native informants to read historical texts. The Bonpos' familiarity with the web of intertextual allusions and with the exegetical commentaries on key concepts found in any work of Bon literature makes them very valuable informants. However, the Bonpos' lack of interest in or awareness of the historical development of their literature often leads them to make anachronistic readings of ancient texts. Moreover, many of the divination practices (*mo*), astrological calculations (*rtsis*), methods of medical diagnosis (*dpyad*), and rituals for placating gods and demons (*gto*) that one finds in Bon literature employ an archaic vocabulary that is unfamiliar to contemporary Bon scholars, since these practices are no longer part of the living Bon tradition. Here the historian might be better served by comparing the descriptions of these practices to what appears in the archaic Dunhuang manuscripts and ancient epigraphy on these topics, while recognizing how problematic it would be to identify such practices as belonging either to the indigenous religion or to pre-Buddhist Bon.

From the perspective of Snellgrove, Kvaerne, and subsequent scholars of Bon literature like Blondeau and Martin, the interest that earlier European scholars had in locating the Bon "shaman" was misplaced. From their critical perspective the Bon "shaman" becomes somewhat of a scapegoat, representing the ignorance of these earlier scholars, a scapegoat better banished in future discussions of this religion. One of the effects of their collaboration with Bon informants is their desire to police the boundaries of "Bon" as an object of western investigation, and forbid the use of the foreign term "shamanism." However, the desire to exorcize the "shaman" from discourse on Tibetan religion has proved unsuccessful, as contemporary anthropologists and new-age enthusiasts have redefined the term. "Shamanism" has proved to be an elastic and elusive term, and much like "fetishism" or "totemism" it has been reclaimed from its earlier pejorative connotations by current anthropological usage.[91]

The desire to delineate and deflate "shamanism" as a powerful yet insubstantial notion echoes the analysis of "totemism" by Claude Lévi-Strauss. In his groundbreaking study on *Totemism*, Lévi-Strauss presented one of the first critical deconstrutions and reconstructions of an anthropological category. His chapter on the "Totemic Illusion" opens with the following profound insight:

> To accept as a theme for discussion a category that one believes to be false always entails a risk, simply by the attention that is paid to it, of entertaining some illusion about its reality. In order to come to grips with an imprecise obstacle one emphasizes its contours where all one really wants is to demonstrate their insubstantiality, for in attacking an ill-founded theory the critic begins by paying it a kind of respect. The phantom which is imprudently summoned up, in the hope of exorcising it for good, vanishes only to reappear, and closer than one imagines to the place where it was at first.[92]

For Lévi-Strauss, the category of "totemism" is an illusory one, a reified concept that has haunted the minds of many western anthropologists, both ghostly and ghastly. What disturbs Levi-Strauss about the ghost of "totemism" is how it has been projected by anthropologists into the unsuspecting minds of "primitive" peoples, marking them as

"savage" or "other", literally akin to animals and plants. Especially repugnant to civilized Christians, the category of totemism affirms a close continuity between man and beasts, an extremely "primitive" or "pagan" idea.[93] Thus "totemism", much like "hysteria" claims Lévi-Strauss, was created by western scientific minds to demarcate and distance themselves from the abnormal and immoral other. As self-appointed exorcist, Lévi-Strauss intends to demonstrate the illusory quality of this category. But before he can dis-illusion his fellow anthropologists he first must reconstruct their images of totemism, which effectively reactivates their potency. Thus the paradox of "entertaining some illusion about its reality," for merely by paying respect to their illusions, those illusions may come to have a life of their own. Such is the risk Levi-Strauss runs in debunking this potent western category, which has had the *real* effect of separating us from them. Yet our author suggests mysteriously that even after the phantom of totemism seems effectively eliminated, it reappears *even closer than one imagines to the place where it was at first.*

Hitchcock has shown us that to give away the ending does not eliminate all suspense in a narrative, so I will give away his conclusion, in anticipation of another argument advanced by an anthropologist about shamanism. Lévi-Strauss believes that totemism is in fact not "out there" in the archaic minds of simple savages, but its truth is found within all our intellects, as a certain mode of metaphorical thinking. For some anthropologists of Tibet too, "shamanism" is to be identified as a mode of analogical thinking, a mode of thinking that includes "totemism."[94] Despite the strenuous efforts by textual scholars of Bon literature to eliminate "shamanism" from scholarship on Tibetan religion, the term has reappeared in the work of anthropologists, new age enthusiasts, and even among the Bonpos themselves: shamanism appears *even closer than one imagines to the place where it was at first.*

Soundings of Tibetan Shamanism by Anthropologists and New Age Enthusiasts

Over the last two decades shamans have resurfaced in numerous anthropological studies on Nepal and Tibet, but the scholar's perspective on the shaman has changed once again. One of the most important transformations to occur in recent ethnographic studies is that the shaman's social and religious role is examined in relation to Buddhist lamas, resulting in a dialectical approach to defining the two ritual specialists. To consider shamanism relationally within a contested social arena may mark an advance over the free-floating conceptions and definitions of shamanism used by earlier scholars. Since the 1970s there have been numerous dissertations and monographs in anthropology published on shamans in Nepal, but most do not address the historical relationship between Buddhist lamas and the shamans in Tibet.

A few anthropologists such as Robert Paul, David Holmberg, and Stan Mumford have pursued their research among Tibeto-Burman groups in Nepal where shamans and Buddhist lamas compete as ritual specialists. Moreover, their research has an ethno-historical purpose in trying to reconstruct diachronically the tense relationship between Buddhist lamas and their Bon "shaman" counterparts in Tibet. Many of the Nepali shamans in fact claim Tibetan descent, and some even trace their lineage back to the Tibetan Bonpos, such as the Tamang Bombos studied by Holmberg,[95] the Ghyabrê and Paju shamans researched by Mumford,[96] and the Sherpa shamans described by Paul.[97] These (fictive) lineages give these anthropologists license to reconstruct pre-Buddhist culture in Tibet teleologically, using the contemporary shamans as the basis for recuperating the original form of Bon shamanism. Their ethnography is thus meant to fill in the silences of the Tibetan historical record, and to account for the process of "Lama-ization."[98] Inevitably, the images they present of the Bon shaman and the Buddhist lama are oversimplified. The anthropologists tend to exaggerate the gap between the complex

and hybrid forms of Shamanism and Buddhism that they encounter in the field and the ideal type of the shaman and the lama that are retrojected into the past.

There is a common dialectical model found in the research of Paul, Holmberg, Mumford, and Samuel that places shamans in duel and dialogue with Buddhist clerics. The shaman and lama serve as two opposing "ideal types" with conflicting modes of authority. The modern Nepali and ancient Tibetan shaman is understood to be a practitioner of ecstatic techniques and healing rites, concerned with restoring harmony to their ailing clients. These scholars tend to regard their authority as nearly autonomous, deriving from their ecstatic experiences, their charisma, as well as their understanding of the local deities and demons who require propitiation, a form of "local knowledge" passed down orally by shaman practitioners. Tibetan lamas, on the other hand, are presented as elite representatives of a universal "great" tradition, with its hierarchical monastic institutions and strict moral injunctions. Their clerical authority derives from their institutional affiliation as well as their ability to read sacred texts. Yet despite all their institutional ties, the lamas are preoccupied above all with the "otherworldly" concern of liberation, rather than with achieving harmony in the world. The formation of these opposing "ideal types" raises a host of interpretive issues, but here I will limit my analysis to some of the problems with the representation of the shaman.

Paul argues that many of the characteristic features of Tibetan shamanism, such as the spontaneous ecstatic experience or the soul journey to the netherworld, have been transformed in its confrontation with Buddhist clerical religion. In the institutionalized context of monastic Buddhism, monks pursue experiences that bear a structural resemblance to shamanic ecstasy, but the highly ritualized form of Buddhist meditation has substantially changed the archaic shamanic techniques. Paul contends that the overlap of spiritual domains and functions resulted in tension between the shaman and the lama. Because they represent two distinct social strata, their similar religious powers become opposing social forces. The shaman, a highly charismatic layperson, unaffiliated

with any institution and not under the jurisdiction of a formal ethical code of behavior, becomes a subversive threat to his spiritual colleague the lama, who represents the monastic institution and abides by its strict moral prescriptions. Historical development, however, favors the lama as the representative of the institution, over the village shaman. Paul subscribes to a Weberian view of historical evolution, in which the telic thrust of history is towards greater rationalization, the growth of institutions, hierarchies, and the routinization of charisma:

> Whereas religious virtuosity may once have coincided for the Sherpa with magical power or charisma, which could be had by village shamans, today it corresponds to obedience to a higher number of moral regulations. I have no particular hypothesis to put forward as to why this should be the case, other than it seems to be the overall direction of the movement of history, as Weber and the Hegelians before him pointed out.[99]

Paul suggests that the shaman's future in Nepal and in the Tibetan cultural context will be insignificant, as he will become drowned out by the rising wave of historical progress.

While Paul views the shaman's institutional and ethical independence as a liability, Mumford, Holmberg and Samuel tend to idealize and overstate the shaman's radical and transgressive ecstatic experiences. From their perspective, the shaman's purported autonomy gives him a privileged place on the boundary, capable of criticizing the official orthodoxy and the hegemonic social authority of the lamas. Sounding much like Ch'an masters,[100] the shamans claim that their ecstatic experiences and healing abilities are not dependent on words and scriptures, and they position themselves as the only mediators with direct access to the divine, open to the influence of alien spirits during their spontaneous experiences. For instance, Mumford records how the modern Ghyabrê and Paju shamans in Nepal interpret the story that features the famous competition of magic between Milarepa and the Bon siddha named Naro Bon chung, in which the traditional Buddhist accounts present Milarepa as the victor. According to the Paju shaman's version of the story however, after Naro Bon chung was defeated in the contest by Milarepa, the Bonpo destroyed his own written texts by burning them in a fire.

As he watched his sacred texts turn into ash, the Bonpo siddha heard a divine voice that commanded him to commit the content of the texts to memory. He proceeded to eat the ashes and "swallow the knowledge," thereby internalizing it. To this day it is claimed that the Paju shamans who descend from Naro Bon chung have their ritual and magical knowledge safely sealed in their minds, while the rival lamas must rely on texts that they can hardly read in the dark, when exorcism rituals must be performed.[101] One can see the shaman's oneupsmanship operating here against the lama, whose knowledge is lost without his texts, while the shaman's authentic knowledge is based on direct experience and not dependent on texts.

Mumford argues (contra Paul) that shamans are better able to adapt to cultural change, while the lama remains bound to a conservative and hegemonic institutional ideology. His characterization of the shaman turns him into an enlightened social critic, an ironic and elusive trickster who undermines the lama's moral seriousness, and especially his preoccupation with karma and individual destiny:

> [The shamans] do not draw a boundary around their identity.... They embrace the interpenetration of different wills, allowing spirits from the periphery and from previous eras to enter their own being. They enter alien realms on behalf of the community.... Because of this self-image the Paju and Ghyabrê are able to view their own motives and images as unbounded, incomplete, and historically changing.... They view their own truths as partial and in need of further elaboration from other sources.[102]

Such a view of the shamans' self-identity as reflexive, dialogical, and decentered tells us more about Mumford's Bakhtin-inspired idealization than about the Nepali shaman or the Bonpo, who undoubtedly consider their own role and tradition to be centered within the boundaries of the true insider. The anthropologist perhaps unconsciously identifies his own ambiguous status, moving betwixt and between cultures, with the shaman moving effortlessly between divine and human realms and serving as a mediator for their clients. Anthropologists often succumb to "ethnographic ventriloquism" (to use Geertz's phrase) when they speak not just about another form of life but speak from within it. While a few

anthropologists have sought to become the shaman's apprentice in order to learn about their trance states,[103] others like Mumford and Holmberg use their ethnographic authorial control to give voice to the shaman's immediate experience. The idealization of the shaman's healing role in restoring harmony to the world may also reflect the western anthropologist's quest for re-enchantment in nature and redemption from modernity, with its repressive bureaucracies and hegemonic hierarchies.

Holmberg's characterization of Tamang shamans (the Bombos) and their soundings also underscores the immediacy of their experience. He voices their claim to be "less dependent than the lambus and lamas on the formalities of training and the necessity of texts and proper procedures." One of his Bompo informants tells him that "Lamas read from books, bombos must speak from their mouths. All comes from the innards. It is not poured from a flask or dumped from a basket [the way lamas and lambus practice]. If you have no consciousness you cannot do it."[104] What seems overlooked here is how the shaman's "spontaneous" experiences and apparently effortless performance is carefully regulated and ritualized, the result of intense formal training, learned from teachers whose authoritative knowledge has been transmitted through a lineage. While Holmberg notes the importance of lineage for the Bombo shaman, who receives initiation from a preceptor, he finds their rhetoric of immediacy persuasive and the elusiveness of their authority intriguing. He declares that the Bombos are enigmatic figures and masters of paradox and ambiguity, who dwell in the breach "reveling and revealing enigmas of experience and order." In response to the dominant narratives of the lamas, who impose closure and hegemonic order, the Bombos offer a "deconstructive voice" that fathoms the "arbitrariness of the social order."[105] Again we see the image of the shaman as a trickster, who offers an alternative and liberating perspective on society, an authentic perspective that he gains through his dreams and from his direct religious experience with the gods.

After Holmberg and Mumford, the most recent anthropologist to use a version of the shaman/cleric dyad model for interpreting Tibetan religions and societies is Geoffrey

Samuel. His work *Civilized Shamans* presents an ambitious effort to encompass all of Tibetan religion within the twin categories of shamanic and clerical, taxonomic categories that are sometimes presented as complementary dyads, and other times as tensely antagonistic.[106] For Samuel, the "shamanic" is present in analogical, metaphorical, and mythic modes of thinking, in the visionary states and ecstatic experiences of the spirit medium and tantric siddha, in a sociocentric sense of self with a charismatic form of authority, and in small-scale decentralized societies. The clerical, on the other hand, is present in rational, linear, and goal-oriented modes of thinking, it gains its authority in the mediations of scripture and texts, and it is found in centralized, hierarchical, and bureaucratic societies. Although Samuel repeatedly emphasizes that both shamanic and clerical modes are present in Tibetan religions, it is clear that he values more highly the shamanic mode of Tibetan society: "I believe that the sophisticated body of shamanic practices within Tibetan Buddhism probably constitutes Tibet's most important single contribution to humanity."[107] In doing so, Samuel reiterates the valorization of the shaman over the clerical monk found in the work of other anthropologists.

How does the shamanic-clerical model map on to Tibetan religions? For Samuel, the shamanic is most clearly evident in the folk or "nameless" religion. Both Bon and Buddhism have shamanic and clerical aspects, although he distinguishes Bon and Nyingma as more shamanic because they are less centralized and hierarchical orders, while the Dge lugs pa and Sa skya monastic orders manifest the clerical hierarchies. What Samuel finds especially valuable about the shamanic mode of the Bon and Nyingma traditions is their reliance on creative visionary experience and revelation, as manifest in their "treasure literature." What is neglected or overlooked in Samuel's somewhat romantic image of direct, unmediated religious experience is the extent to which the practitioners were concerned with legitimizing their treasure texts and revelatory experiences in terms of past precedent, making them more conservative and traditional (and clerical) than he supposes.[108]

With the anthropological studies of Nepali and Tibetan religion by Mumford, Holmberg and Samuel, shamanism appears to have earned a widespread currency in academic circles. Yet its value is even more inflated in popular spiritual circles, especially among American new age adherents. Evidence for the commodification of shamanism can be found on the Internet, where one can buy shamanic paraphernalia, and in the popular spiritual literature that has flooded the American market for consumption by new-age enthusiasts. In magazines like *Shaman's Drum* and in popular do-it-yourself shamanic guidebooks,[109] the experiential benefits of shamanic techniques are touted, and the ancient wisdom of the shaman, who is in contact with another "separate reality," is pursued. The connection between the anthropologist's fascination with shamanic experience and the new age participant in shamanic vision quests is no mere (mirror?) coincidence. Many neo-shamans read ethnographic accounts of shamanic experience as a script for enactment. Indeed, it was Eliade's proposal that students of religion practice "creative hermeneutics," meaning that they ought to strive towards reliving and recreating the sacred experiences and events of the past. This message has been adopted wholeheartedly among the contemporary apologists of shamanism, who read Eliade's study of *Shamanism* as a guidebook for their own ecstatic vision quests.[110]

Understandably, savvy American fashion designers have sought to cash in on this opportunity to sell Tibetan shamanic exotica as the "latest" in primitive chic. In a 1995 J. Peterman Company Catalogue, one can find a "Tibetan Shaman's Jacket and Cap" for sale, advertised in the section called "Booty, Spoils & Plunder:"

> It's official. Crystals are out, Tibetan Buddhism is in. The monasteries are springing up across America; stars of Hollywood, Rock, and Wall Street are chanting *Om mani padme hum*. But why play catch-up when you can be a jump ahead? Long before Buddhism came to Tibet, native Bon shamans were doing quite nicely without having to give up (as good Buddhists must) a belief in one's personal existence. Empowered by ceremonial jackets like the one you see here, they focused on practical matters like curing toothaches and assuring a bumper crop of *Hordeum vulgare*. They could fly through the air, communicate by telepathy

> (cheaper than MCI), do interesting things to their enemies. Isn't there someone you'd like to torment, perhaps launching nine kinds of destructive hailstorms against? Authentic Bon shaman's jacket, handmade in northern India by Tibetan refugees who know how.... Price: $175.

What is striking about the J. Peterman image of the Bon "shaman" is that he is less a master of ecstatic trance and a spiritual healer than a powerful magician whose jacket represents "booty, spoils and plunder." We might recall that according to Bon histories, the exotic emblems (including the tiger and leopard fur-lined capes and jackets) worn by the Bon priests in ancient times were granted as gifts by the Tibetan kings, in reward for their role in suppressing demonic enemies. The kings decorated the bodies of their Bon priests with the booty and spoils from the defeated countries, and their bold display of these emblems was meant to embellish the priest's power as a form of metonymic domination. Today, the Bon "shaman" jacket is less a reward for power than a symbol of the aspiration to power. The advertisement even proclaims "You *bet* you'll get the table you want when you wear this one."

What makes the J. Peterman advertisement even more revealing is its suggestion that Tibetan refugees, who fabricate "authentic" Bon jackets, are now active participants in the western consumer's appropriation of Bon shamanism. Today one can read notices in *Shaman's Drum* or attend New Age institutes for retreats with authentic Tibetan masters, where "the ancient shamanic techniques of Bon" are taught. Following in the footsteps of Carlos Castenada, people sign up for Tibetan Bon seminars on Shamanism hoping to meet the Tibetan Don Juan. These examples illustrate how "shamanism" has become commodified into a popular image of Bon, not only for western consumers, but for Tibetan Bonpos who participate as well. The Tibetan Bon teachers have discovered their own identity as shamans by looking into the mirror of alterity that western disciples hold up to them.

Mirroring, Mimicry, and Intercultural Mimesis

My somewhat circuitous line of argument in this chapter has involved criss-crossing back and forth between western representations of Tibetan religion and common Tibetan representations of the "other." My intent is to emphasize how Orientalist discourse overlaps with and repeats (consciously or unconsciously) Tibetan polemics. In his pioneering study on *Orientalism*, Edward Said sought to grasp the "sheer knitted together strength of Orientalist discourse, its very close ties to the enabling socio-economic and political institutions and its redoubtable durability."[111] What Said perhaps failed to appreciate in that work is the extent to which Orientalist discourse may be knitted out of strands found in Asian text(ile)s. By crisscrossing back and forth between western scholarship and Tibetan polemical literature, some of their common discursive strands may come unraveled, revealing that the images of Tibetan religion found in recent scholarship are not airy-fairy fantasies or demonic delusions that western scholars alone have invented. The point of this exercise is to recognize how western representations of Tibetan religion took form, informed at times by Tibetan representations of the other religion. I do not intend either to place blame or excuse earlier scholars for their representations. Rather than assuming the moral high ground and criticizing earlier stereotypes of Tibetan religion, my intent is to problematize an assumption made by some Orientalist critics that western scholars and missionaries have fabricated a discourse unconnected to native representations. The dialogical reading technique promoted here relativizes the cultural identities of Tibet and the west, and it supports a vision of all cultural forms as "radically and quintessentially hybrid."[112]

The technique of criss-crossing pursued here also relies on metaphors of mirroring and mimicry. The reduplicated term "criss-crossing" itself suggests a reflexive movement. It involves moving betwixt and between the hierarchies and histories of Tibet and the west, showing that the mirror of alterity present in western images of their

Tibetan others picks up reflections found in the mirroring historical narratives of Buddhism and Bon. I have focused on the mirror image in particular as an ambivalent trope with its own agency, not because the mirror image functions as a universal archetype, or because it serves as a key to the psychic unity of mankind. As we have seen, mirror images are deceptive, never identical or fixed. Just as mimicry in the Tibetan context often creates something novel and unusual, so too does the western discourse that mirrors Tibetan polemical categories produce new effects. For example, Waddell is instrumental in codifying the category of "Lamaism" to describe Tibetan Buddhism, while Hoffmann plays a similar role in the codification of the category of "shamanism" to describe Bon. Both of these categories have been appropriated by some Tibetans as legitimate (and legitimating) terms to describe and authenticate their own traditions, although once again these terms are transformed in the process.[113]

Many more examples could be cited to illustrate the "elective affinities" between the historiography of western Orientalists and Tibetan styles of self-representation. But the above examples are sufficient for my purpose of demonstrating how criss-crossing between the iconic extremes found in Tibetan polemics and western interpretations illustrates a form of "intercultual mimesis."[114] By reading certain regnant images of the other cross-culturally, we begin to delineate more clearly the intersection of western and Tibetan forms of history. Criss-crossing is a technique which can illuminate this complex process of intercultural borrowing, bringing out the local flavors and particular cultural culinary genius behind the celebrated "pizza effect."

Much of what follows in this style of analysis is indebted to the insights of the post-colonial theorist Homi Bhabha, whose fascination with mimicry and duplicity enacts the doubling in his own name. Mimicry is a common ploy used to incorporate the other as almost the same, but not quite, resulting in a stereotype of the aping other as derivative and partial. Bhabha aptly characterizes this effect of mimicry in the western colonial construction of the other as "not quite/not white".[115] The racist stereotypes found in

colonialist discourse about the Simian Black, whose mimicry of the White Man's manners only makes him more akin to the monkey, or the Lying Asiatic, whose essential duplicity and prevarication makes him a shady figure according to the white standard of truth, always makes the other recognizable, yet not-quite-white. Such stereotypes appropriate the native into a sub-class only to show how inappropriate he really is.

Yet what Bhabha explores is not how crude, simplistic, and fixed these stereotypes are, but rather their dynamic and ambivalent qualities, which produce some anxiety for those who use them. Aping stereotypes present the other as partial, a somewhat grotesque distortion which, when the mimicking other returns its gaze, is distinctly unsettling to the self-same identity of the stereotyper. Herein lies the menacing side of mimicry, in that it inadvertently undermines the authority of the original, and the fixity of the white standard of normality starts to slip. Mimicry always makes a difference that threatens to be total, but not quite, so it must be disavowed, only to bring the other disturbingly close to the self-same presence of the colonialist. As Bhabha puts it,

> The discourse of mimicry is constructed around an *ambivalence*; in order to be effective, mimicry must continually produce its slippage, its excesses, its difference. The authority of that mode of colonial discourse that I have called mimicry is therefore stricken by an indeterminacy: mimicry emerges as the representation of a difference that is itself a process of disavowal.[116]

The ambivalence of mimicry leads to a kind of double-trouble, or better yet, a double agent. Situated in a shifty position between difference and sameness, mimicry assumes an agency all its own, without a subject. As a form of imperfect repetition, mimicry seems to produce unanticipated effects: "the whole question of agency gets moved from a fixed point into a process of circulation.... Mimicry at once enables power and produces the loss of agency."[117] Bhabha suggests that mimicry can become a form of resistance on the part of the colonized by problematizing the signs of racial and cultural priority. The oppressed native is never a pure victim without any means of resistance or agency. While part of her collaborates, compromises, and adjusts, the other part defies and

subverts, often in the name of collaboration or under the guise of obsequious imitation. It is precisely the ambiguous nature of mimetic agency and its potential for resisting the dominant discourse that I would like to explore further here with some examples from Buddhist and Bon literature, echoing some of the stylized symmetries that were discussed in the previous chapter.

The polemical duels found in Tibetan histories between Buddhists and Bonpos were rife with accusations and counter-accusations of one's opponents being mimic men. Buddhists often describe their opponents in stereotypical terms, as near mirror images, but always with some distortion, inversion, or perversion. Bonpos are notorious for circumambulating holy objects "backwards" (i.e. counterclockwise). We have already noted that the symbol for their original teachings, the swastika (*g.yung drung*) is also "backwards," pointing to the left instead of the right as the Buddhist image does. Likewise, texts "discovered" by Bon sages are often classified by Buddhist polemicists as *bsgyur bon*, meaning texts that were "transformed," "translated," or "plagiarized" deceitfully from authentic Buddhist sources. Other examples created by Buddhists to illustrate the Bonpos' inversion and perversion of their practices would include the (silly) claim that when Bonpos try to practice the tantric technique of consciousness transference (*pho ba*), the soul of the deceased is not withdrawn from the fontanel on top of the head, but from the anus. Likewise, Bon iconography supposedly inverts the hierarchical relationships between figures, elevating the animals that usually serve as vehicles to a superior position, standing over the supine figures of enlightened beings like the Buddha or Padmasambhava.[118] From the perspective of Buddhist orthodoxy then, these grotesque and distorted images are recognizable as genealogically related and derivative, but certainly not pure Buddhism: not quite/not white. From our perspective, these Buddhist stereotypes also serve to locate Bon texts, practices, and practitioners in a subordinate position in relation to the pure white standards of Buddhist orthodoxy. But there is a dark and menacing quality to these images as well, and they are sometimes

identified as monstrous and demonic, akin to the hybrid spirits known as *mi 'amci* (Skt. *kinnara*): half-human, half-gorilla.

Bonpos retaliate against the Buddhists with the accusation that their own ancient texts were plagiarized by the Buddhists, a process they say began during the reign of Khri srong lde btsan, the demonic king who brutally suppressed their religion. According to Bon histories, Khri srong lde btsan wished to ban Bon in Tibet, so he arranged for a debate and magical contest to take place between the Buddhists and the Bonpos, with the provision that whoever lost must convert to their opponents religion or else leave Tibet. According to Bon narratives, the contest was actually won by the Bonpos but the king unjustly declared them the losers, and ordered them either to convert to Buddhism, commit suicide, or be banished from the four quarters of Tibet. Surprisingly, the undisputed Bon hero in this situation is Dran pa gnam mkha' ("Recollection-Sky"), one of the few who decided to shave his head and don the robes of a Buddhist monk. His decision might be viewed as a paradigmatic instance of Bon resistance to Buddhism through mimicry. As Lacan once noted, "the effect of mimicry is camouflage,"[119] a technique used in human warfare, and Dran pa gnam mkha's camouflage as a Buddhist monk enables him to work as a "double agent." While appearing to the outsiders as an insider, Dran pa gnam mkha' works earnestly to preserve the Bon sacred scriptures for posterity by hiding them safely from his fellow Buddhists, who are bent on transforming (*bsgyur*) them all into Buddhist texts, and then destroying the originals.

The *Srid pa rgyud kyi kha byang chen mo*, an important Bon cosmological and historical treasure text (*gter ma*), narrates the pivotal event of Dran pa's conversion act. Before donning the robes of a Buddhist monk, Dran pa delivers a moving speech in verse to his fellow Bonpos and Buddhists, an exemplary instance of religious and political *upāya* in action. Reacting to the king's unjust and unenlightened decision to banish Bon from Tibet, the Bon tantric trickster speaks with a forked tongue here, shifting between the two levels of truth found in Buddhist (and Bon) philosophical discourse.

> The king of Tibet [Khri srong lde btsan] and ignorant living beings, Buddhists and Bonpos who are sitting here, believe in a religion that does not exist. If you desire to make the kingdom white, and wish to attain Enlightenment, why do you differentiate between you and me? Why do you make a distinction between Bon and Buddhism? The king of method and wisdom radiates power and knowledge. Alas that the two should be (accounted) different, and one subdued and the other not! Alas that spontaneous knowledge accomplished should be accounted unaccomplished! Alas that you Buddhists should be deceived into introducing distinctions between virtue and vice in the shining knowledge of the mental sphere of sentient beings! Alas that those who do not understand in this way and are bound with the traditional teachings, should not, though they search after it, attain enlightenment! I am like the sun and moon in the sky. I neither love nor hate sentient beings.... A person who had attained realization, would not have made a distinction between Bon and Buddhism. He would make no distinction between his son and his enemy.
>
> Firstly, the king is mighty. Secondly, the Buddhists are jealous. Thirdly, I have (no feeling of) partiality for anything. Therefore, I shall be ordained.[120]

In a dramatic gesture, Dran pa gnam mkha' next cut off his hair himself, in imitation of the renunciation of Siddhārtha, and proceeded to ordain himself by donning the Buddhist robes, refusing the help of Buddhist monks in his contempt for them.

In effect, what Dran pa does in his speech and his dramatic gesture is mimic the absolutist rhetoric and the noble act of renunciation found in Buddhism; but he then turns it against his opponents, who are caught up in dualistic delusions that distinguish between Buddhist/Bon, between insider/outsider, and so forth. Adopting the position situated in the rarefied sphere of non-dual truth, he claims there is no difference at all between Buddhism and Bon. But the king, who has divorced his power from knowledge, or his method from his insight into the nature of reality as non-dual, is obviously unenlightened, with no realization of the ultimate truth of Buddhism/Bon. Dran pa's rhetoric of inclusivism mimics the non-dual language so familiar to his opponents, but it effectively excludes them as outsiders for operating at the level of conventional truth: not right/not white. Still assuming the moral high ground, Dran pa concedes that he cannot fight

against his jealous (yet more powerful) Buddhist opponents, so he will play their game and don the robes, acting as though it makes absolutely no difference to him.

But of course his act of mimicry *does* make a difference—in fact it makes all the difference. For once he assumes his "insider" status, Dran pa goes to work to save Bon from certain extinction by clandestinely hiding Bon texts as treasure texts. In practice then, he works as an effective double agent for the future benefit of Bon. This is why his conversion to Buddhism is not viewed in posterity as the act of a traitor, but rather the enlightened action of a clever trickster. Foreseeing the imminent demise of Bon in Tibet, Dran pa manages to conceal the literature right under the very ground upon which the unsuspecting Buddhist persecutors walked. Dran pa's mimicry makes a mockery of those Buddhist historical narratives that represent the same event as the righteous suppression of Bon heretics. Khri srong lde btsan, regarded in awe by Buddhists as an enlightened monarch and defender of the truth, is singled out in particular as an ignorant buffoon, a power-hungry ruler threatened by the moral and magical superiority of the Bon priests. Bon historical narratives also make it clear that even at the conventional level of truth, Buddhism was clearly inferior to Bon. Once Bon is banished from Tibet the local gods and protectors of Bon become angry and wreck their vengeance upon the king, who falls ill, and his subjects become miserable. The king and his subjects recover only after the ritual intervention of a Bon sage, who exacts a promise from the king to cease the suppression of Bon.

This orthodox Bon story, where Dran pa cleverly subverts Buddhist power and authority while under the guise of collaborating with them, illustrates well the role of mimicry as resistance. Bon texts problematize Buddhist authority by asserting their own religious purity and historical priority in Tibet through the miraculous intervention of their founder Gshen rab. One of the earliest canonical hagiographies of Gshen rab also illustrates the point made by Bhabha that mimicry complicates the whole question of agency by setting it in circulation. The canonical hagiography of Gshen rab called the

Gzer mig in many ways mimics the Indian biographies of the Buddha, and especially the structured presentation of Śākyamuni's life in twelve acts found in the *Lalitavistara*, from his miraculous birth, his childhood as a prince, up to his death bed scene and the distribution of his relics. Yet much of this biography of Gshen rab presents his adventures in various countries as a missionary, wonder-worker and demon-destroyer, more reminiscent of the Indian siddha tradition than the earlier biographies of the Buddha. Scholars (including Hoffmann) noted the parallels between the lives of Gshen rab and Padmasambhava, with little speculation about who is copying from whom. Everyone knew the guilty culprits must be the Bonpos.

However, after careful analysis of parallel passages found in the *Gzer mig* and the *Lha 'dre bka' thang* (on Padmasambhava's taming of demons in Nepal and Tibet), Anne-Marie Blondeau demonstrated rather convincingly that if any direct borrowing occurred, it was the late compiler of the *Lha 'dre bka' thang* who lifted passages from the *Gzer mig*, substituting the names of Buddhist heroes for the Bonpos.[121] Blondeau's conclusion certainly came as a surprise to those who had always assumed the priority and purity of Buddhist texts, and who regarded all Bon texts as nothing but cheap imitations. But to accept the historical priority of the *Gzer mig* does not mean that one must ascribe a "pure" origin to this Bon text. The compilers of the *Gzer mig* undoubtedly relied on hagiographical models of Indian ancestry, and adapted these to the Tibetan religious milieu. The resulting hybrid text about the Bon founder in turn served as a model for Buddhist hagiographies about Padmasambhava. The point here is simply that mimicry sets in motion repetition with some difference, producing hybrid forms, which in turn are imitated, but with some transformation (*bsgyur*): this is how novelty arises. There is an important aesthetic value to be gained by recognizing the transformation that occurs with new and unexpected combinations of cultural and religious forms. As one outspoken advocate of cultural hybridity has put it, "*Mélange*, hotchpotch, a bit of this and a bit of that is *how newness enters the world*."[122] Mimicry, with its potential for producing

unforeseen effects, a sameness that seems somehow to slip into difference, spawns its own bastard children. Both Padmasambhava and Gshen rab are bastard children of mimicking narratives.

The celebration of intermingling, mongrelization, or change-through-mimicry is never popular with the apostles of purity and orthodoxy. No one would perhaps more vehemently deny the intertwining histories and the reflexive identities of Bon and Buddhism than a figure like Milarepa, who is famous for challenging the authority and authenticity of Bon.[123] However, Milarepa's interactions with Bonpos were not limited exclusively to polemical exchanges or to duels of magic where he defeats his opponents. In the *Hundred Thousand Songs of Milarepa* (*Mi la mgur 'bum*) he also makes an appearance as a subversive mimic man, who cures a dying Bonpo layman by performing a "Bon" ceremony, but reinterpreted with "Buddhist" normative categories. Milarepa chants a Bon liturgy in the proper Bon key, uses Bon mantras, invokes Bon deities, performs divination techniques, ransom rituals, demon dances, and animal sacrifices, but all of these "Bon" practices are given "Buddhist" meanings. Naturally enough in this Buddhist narrative, Milarepa's mimicked performance cures the dying Bonpo, and its subversive effect is felt when the grateful patient converts to Buddhism and denies Bon.[124] This story is treated then as a conversion drama executed through Milarepa's *upāya*, who so skillfully provides a "higher" Buddhist interpretation for Bon practices. Milarepa's graceful performance may also be viewed as a *pas-de-deux*, in which Milarepa imitates the dying Bonpo's expectations of what constitutes an effective healing ritual, but draws him into the Buddhist fold by attributing Buddhist meanings to them. His conscious mimicry is certainly creative and quite clever—something new emerges from his highly reflexive performance.

But is it really "Buddhist" and not "Bon"? One could easily imagine a very different ending to this performance, in which the dying Bonpo recognizes everything as being authentically "Bon," including the philosophical discourse on emptiness, the two

truths, *bodhicitta*, karma, and the *trikāya*. All of these concepts of course appear in Bon canonical texts too, and any well-informed Bonpo would recognize them as belonging to his own tradition. Perhaps if this were a Bon narrative, the dying Bonpo would recover and congratulate Milarepa for performing such an orthodox Bon ritual. The joke would really be on Milarepa in this case, for all of his ironic mimicking and distancing would have been lost on his audience. Simply put, the outcome of Milarepa's performance is only controlled by the narrative frame. What ensures a happy Buddhist ending is simply that this incident occurs in a Buddhist text. For an "outsider" like myself though, Milarepa's song effectively elides the difference between Buddhist and Bon. Here is an act of mimicry whose subversive effect could backfire with an audience of outsiders. Milarepa, the upholder of Buddhist orthodoxy, is operating in an indistinct gray zone when he performs this "Bon" ritual, for what would an orthodox Bonpo find objectionable in this philosophical interpretation? Precious little, except Milarepa's attribution of these doctrines to Śākyamuni Buddha rather than to Gshen rab; and even the Bon layperson is taught that Śākyamuni was none other than an incarnation of Gshen rab.

Many more examples might be cited from Bon and Buddhist literature that feature enlightened mimic men, but this would make the chapter unduly long. These examples are sufficient to illustrate that the moral and meaning of these mimicking narrative depends upon who controls the narrative, whether the writer is Buddhist or Bonpo. In the next chapter, we will become aware of even more subtle forms of mimicry in the mirror-work of modern Tibetan historians, who are interpreting these historical narratives and deriving new meanings from them. Many modern Tibetan scholars are returning to the Buddhist and Bon histories with the hope of finding authentic expressions of native Tibetan or national values. Their work is motivated by their concern over Tibet's contemporary political plight under Chinese colonialism and a nostalgia for imperial Tibet, but their scholarship is also influenced by modern western models of critical historiography. In the work of the Tibetan "nativists" especially, we will see how the

indigenous Tibetan identity sought in the past is shaped in part by modern western values, and even secularism. In turn, the revisionist interpretations of the past set forth by these modern nativist historians are making an impact in the field of Tibetan Studies, providing yet another example of intercultural mimesis. As a result of this process of mimetic exhange, "Bon" as an object of study is being re-constituted and its value reassessed, often as an "authentic" religion, the aboriginal alternative to Tibet's cultural import of Buddhism.

Notes to Chapter II

[1] Erik Haarh, *The Yarluṅ Dynasty: a study with particular regard to the contribution of myths and legends to the history of ancient Tibet and the origin and nature of its kings* (Copenhagen: G.E.C. Gad's Forlag, 1969), p. 327.

[2] All three of these complex terms have served as emblems of Tibetan Buddhism in popular and academic discourse, and their usage has been investigated in a number of recent studies. While a critical study of Tibetan "mysticism" remains to be written, for an excellent study of Indian "mysticism" see Richard King's *Orientalism and Religion: Postcolonial Theory, India, and 'The Mystic East'* (New York: Routledge 1999). The category of "Tantrism" has been scrutinized, its discursive purposes and semantic history reviewed. For an examination of the term Tantra in the Indo-Tibetan Buddhist context, see Donald S. Lopez, "The Heart Sutra as Tantra" in *Elaborations on Emptiness* (Princeton University Press, 1996), pp. 78-104; for a genealogy of Tantrism within the British colonial imagination, see Hugh B. Urban, "The Extreme Orient: The Construction of 'Tantrism' as a Category in the Orientalist Imagination," in *Religion* 29 (1999), pp. 123-146; Urban has examined the role of the category of Tantrism in New Age religious discourse in "The Cult of Ecstasy: Tantrism, the New Age, and the Spiritual Logic of Late Capitalism," *History of Religions* 39.2 (February 2000), pp. 268-302. For a critical genealogy of the term "Lamaism," see Donald S. Lopez, "'Lamaism' and the Disappearance of Tibet" in *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 38.1 (1996), pp. 3-25; for a longer version of the same essay, see Lopez's *Prisoners of Shangri-la: Tibetan Buddhism and the West* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), pp. 15-45.

[3] For some recent studies of the role of "critical terms" in the discipline of religious studies, see *Guide to the Study of Religion*, ed. by Willi Braun and Russell T. McCutcheon (London: Cassell, 2000); *Critical Terms for Religious Studies* ed. by Mark C. Taylor (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), especially pp. 16-18; and *Critical Terms for Literary Study*, ed. by Frank Lentricchia and Thomas McLaughlin (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995). In the Introduction to this latter volume, the editors offer an etymology of "term": "A 'term' is a boundary line, a line of demarcation. It defines a field in which work can be done, within the limits of the term. But like all boundaries, even those meticulously surveyed, terms are social and arbitrary, not natural and inevitable. What divides my property from my neighbor's is not a natural boundary but a social system within which certain definitions or property prevail. It is important to remember that terms function in the same way. They limit and regulate our reading practices. But they do not do so by divine fiat.... It is not the job of this text to regulate those boundaries more carefully. Rather, these essays attempt to de-naturalize the limits that our critical system imposes."

[4] Jean-Pierre Vernant, in his Forward to Maurice Olender's *The Languages of Paradise: Race, Religion and Philology in the Nineteenth Century*, trans. by Arthur Goldhammer (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992), pp. viii-ix.

[5] Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*, (London: Tavistock Publications, 1970), p. xv.

[6] H. A. Jäschke, *A Tibetan-English Dictionary* (London, 1881, reprinted by Motilal Banarsidass, 1987), p. 372. The *Report of the Royal Bavarian Academy of Science* cited by Jäschke contains an article by Emil Schlagintweit, *Über die Bon-pa Sekte in Tibet*, Heft I. (1866), pp. 1-12. This appears to be the earliest scholarly article written about Bon.

[7] H. A. Jäschke, *A Tibetan-English Dictionary*, pp. iii-iv. In a letter written to Sir Henry Yule on the topic of Bon, Jäschke reiterates that not much is known about this religion other than what Emil Schlagintweit published. "So much seems to be certain that it was the ancient religion of Tibet, before Buddhism penetrated into the country, and that even at later periods it several times gained the ascendancy when the secular power was of a disposition averse to the Lamaistic hierarchy. Another opinion is that the Bon religion was originally a mere fetishism, and related to or identical with Shamanism; this appears to me very probable and easy to reconcile with the former supposition, for it may afterwards, on becoming acquainted with the Chinese doctrine of the 'Taossé,' have adorned itself with many of its tenets." Sir Henry Yule, *The Book of Ser Marco Polo* (1870, reprinted in New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1903), p. 324. The parallels between Bon and Taoism were often discussed and debated in the early scholarship on Bon. See note 28 below.

[8] The term "placeholder" is borrowed from Wayne Proudfoot, who uses it to describe how certain terms function in the "ineffable" discourse of mystics. See his *Religious Experience* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), pp. 127-129.

[9] H. A. Jäschke, *A Tibetan-English Dictionary*, pp. iii. Jäschke's Christian missionary purpose in compiling his dictionary was hardly unique. His predecessor, Alexander Csomo de Körös, the "Father of Tibetology," noted at the beginning of his Dictionary published in 1834 that "When there shall be more interest taken for Buddhism (which has much in common with the spirit of true Christianity) and for diffusing Christian and European knowledge through the most eastern parts of Asia, the Tibetan Dictionary may be much improved, enlarged, and illustrated by the addition of Sanskrit terms." This is quoted in the Preface of Sarat Chandra Das's Dictionary as the reason for compiling yet another dictionary with more Sanskrit terms. See Sarat Chandra Das, *A Tibetan-English Dictionary* (Alipore: West Bengal Government Press, 1902; reprinted in Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1992), p. v.

[10] Sarat Chandra Das's exploits as a secret agent for the British government served as a source of inspiration for Rudyard Kipling's novel *Kim*, in which he was the model for the character Hurree Chunder Mookerjee, the Bengali scholar and spy. More recently the character Hurree Chunder Mookerjee has been immortalized in a novel by the Tibetan writer Jamyang Norbu, *The Mandala of Sherlock Holmes* (New Delhi: Harper Collins

India, 1999), where Mookerjee serves as the traveling companion and sidekick to Sherlock Holmes, who travels incognito to Tibet as the Norwegian explorer Sigerson.

[11] Sarat Chandra Das, "The Bon (Pön) Religion," *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal* 50 (1881), pp. 187-205.

[12] Sarat Chandra Das, *Gyal Rab Bon-Ke Juṅ Neh* (Calcutta: Bengal Secretariat Book Depot, 1915; an earlier edition appeared in Darjeeling in 1900). The Tibetan text also appears in *Three Sources for a History of Bon*, edited by Khedrup Gyatsho (Dolanji: Tibetan Bon Monastic Centre, 1974), pp. 1-196. The name of this text is misleading, for Das invented it in the absence of the first page of this text. Das reported that these pages were lost, but that he had translated the content of the first page shortly after discovering the work in Tibet. Among Bon historians, this work by Khyung po Blo gros rgyal mtshan is known as *Gling gzhi [=Gleng gzhi] bstan pa'i byung khungs*. A section of the *Gleng gzhi* appears in Namkhai Norbu, *Zhang Bod Lorgyus: la storia antica dello Zhang Zhung e del Tibet* (Napoli: Comunita Dzogchen, 1981), pp. 102-128. Three of the twenty-six sections of this text were translated into German by Berthold Laufer in "Über ein tibetisches Geshichtswerk der Bonpo," in *T'oung pao* Serie II, Vol. II. (1901), pp. 24-44.

[13] Sarat Chandra Das, *A Tibetan-English Dictionary*, p. 879.

[14] The identification of Bon with Shamanism is also made in Das's preface to the *Gyal rab Bon-ke Juṅ neh* (p. 1) where he appends a note for the term *Bon*: "*Bon* signifies religion in the terminology of the Bon-po, the early *Shaman* of Tibet."

[15] Thu'u bkvan Blo zang Chos kyi nyi ma, *Thu'u bkvan grub mtha'* (Lanzhou, Gansu: Mi rigs dpe skrun khang, 1984), p. 381. Sarat Chandra Das' translation of the same passage is much more dramatic: "The Bonpo of that age were skilled in witchcraft, the performance of mystical rites for suppressing evil spirits and cannibal hobgoblins of the nether region, the invocation of the venerable gods above, and the domestic ceremonies to appease the wrath of malignant spirits of the middle region (Earth) caused by the 'pollution of the hearth.'" "The Bon (Pön) Religion" in *Tibetan Studies*, ed. by Alaka Chattopadhyaya (Calcutta: K. P. Bagchi, 1984), pp. 5-6.

[16] For example, see Shes rab 'byung gnas's polemic against Bon, the *Dgongs gcig Yig cha*, translated by Dan Martin in *The Emergence of Bon and the Tibetan Polemical Tradition*, unpublished dissertation, (Bloomington: University of Indiana, 1991), pp. 210-211.

[17] Thu'u bkvan, *Thu'u bkvan grub mtha'*, p. 381.

[18] Thu'u bkvan, *Thu'u bkvan grub mtha'*, p. 382. Sarat Chandra Das identifies *sham thabs sngon po can* in his Dictionary (p. 1231) as "a *Tirthika* Paṇḍit who preached a perverse system of Tantra and used to wear a blue petticoat," and he cites a passage from the Biography of Atiśa (*Jo bo rje Ati sha'i rnam thar*). This passage is translated in his

Indian Pandits in the Land of Snows ed. by Nobin Chandra Das (Calcutta: Baptist Mission Press, 1893, reprinted New Delhi: Asian Educational Services, 1992), p. 56: "A certain heretic priest of the *blue robe* order has been preaching immorality and obscene doctrine. By admixture of these foreign elements the sacred doctrine of Buddha has been very much debased." This blue-robed Paṇḍit frequently appears in Tibetan polemical literature, sometimes representing the perverse and lustful nature of Bon clerics (who wear blue robes), but at other times representing Buddhist tantrikas gone bad. This emblematic figure appears in a song attributed to Milarepa, when he is debating with a Bon priest and arguing why it is nonsense to believe that Bon is the "elder brother" of Buddhism. Here is an excerpt from Milarepa's song that provides a humorous etiology for the "blue-robed Paṇḍit": "According to more modern sources [sings Milarepa] a very clever Buddhist pandit in the land of India visited the house of a whore. Arising before dawn, he dressed, but by mistake wrapped himself in the woman's skirt instead of his own. Returning to the monastery at dawn, he was seen wearing the blue skirt and expelled from the community. He made his way eventually to Tibet and with hard feelings in this land of exile created a perverse religion and named it *Bon*." From the *Rje tsun Mi la ras pa rdo rje' mgyur druk sogs gsung rgyun thor bu ba 'ga'*, trans. by Lama Kunga Rimpoche and Brian Cutillo in *Drinking the Mountain Stream: New Stories and Songs by Milarepa*, (Lotsawa Press, 1978), p. 148.

[19] Thu'u bkvan, *Thu'u bkvan grub mtha'*, p. 389.1-3. The "sage of 'Bri gung" refers to Shes rab 'byung gnas (1187-1241), who wrote an anti-Bon polemical tract entitled the *Dgongs gcig Yig cha*, translated by Martin in his dissertation, pp. 204-223. Thu'u bkvan's indebtedness to Sher rab 'byung gnas was noted by the Bon scholar Dpal ldan Tshul khrims in *G.yung drung Bon gyi bstan 'byung* (Dolanji: Tibetan Bonpo Monastic Centre, 1972, Vol. 2, p. 535.

[20] Dan Martin, *The Emergence of Bon and the Tibetan Polemical Tradition*, p. 172. Also see Martin, "Beyond Acceptance and Rejection? The Anti-Bon Polemic Included in the Thirteenth-Century *Single Intention* (*Dgong-gcig Yig-cha*) and Its Background in Tibetan Religious History," *Journal of Indian Philosophy*, 25 (1997), pp. 263-305. Also see my "Cracking the Mirror: A Critical Genealogy of Scholarship on Tibetan Bon and the 'Canonical' Status of *The Crystal Mirror of Doctrinal Systems*," *The Tibet Journal* XXIII.4 (Winter 1998), pp. 92-107.

[21] Anton Schiefner, *Über das Bon-po Sūtra "Das weisse Nāga-hunderttausend,"* Mémoires de l'Academie de St. Petersbourg, VII. série, Tome 28 no. 1 (St. Petersburg, 1881).

[22] Joseph Francis Rock, *The Na-khi Nāga Cult and Related Ceremonies* (Roma: Istituto Italiano Per Il medio ed Estremo Oriente, 1952), p. 1. The Bon text translated by Schiefner, the *White Nāga Bon Sūtra*, is discussed by William Rockhill in *Land of the Lamas* (1891) where he notes in a footnote on pages 217-218 that the "Lu-bum karpo" simply substitutes Bon terms for Buddhist words: "This work does not contain any

theories or ideas antagonistic to the ordinary teachings of the Buddhists; its cosmogony is purely Buddhist; the same may be said of the ethics and metaphysics."

[23] Ekai Kawaguchi, *Three Years in Tibet* (Madras: Theosophical Publishing House, 1909), p. 131. Kawaguchi's comments on polyandry and Bon can be found on p. 373. Kawaguchi's distaste for Tibetans as dirty, aggressive, violent, and promiscuous can be heard echoing in the work of another Japanese scholar Hajime Nakamura, who characterized the Tibetan *mentalité* in a very similar manner. Like Kawaguchi, Nakamura argued that Tibetan marriage customs (and polyandry in particular) are quite ancient in origin, and their persistence is said to account for the unimportance of family lineage and filial piety; and like Kawaguchi, Nakamura notes the similar characteristics between Bon and Shinto, "both of which are of shamanistic origin." See *Ways of Thinking of Eastern Peoples* (Honolulu: East-West Center Press, 1964; reprint, 1985), p. 304, 309, 333.

[24] Ekai Kawaguchi, *Three Years in Tibet*, p. 562.

[25] Ekai Kawaguchi, *Three Years in Tibet*, p. 131.

[26] François Hartog, *The Mirror of Herodotus: The Representation of the Other in the Writing of History* trans. by Janet Lloyd (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), p. 225.

[27] Kawaguchi's ethnographic comparison of Buddhist/Bon synthesis in Tibet with Buddhist/Shinto synthesis in Japan could be elevated to a more systematic comparison by examining the use of *honji suijaku* theory in the esoteric Buddhism of Japan and the use of maṇḍalas, *upāya*, and emanation bodies (*sprul sku*) in Tantric Buddhism, especially in the "Universalist" (*Ris med*) movement.

[28] William Rockhill testifies that the Bonpos in eastern Tibet were usually identified by the Chinese as Taoists, and Gshen rab identified with Laozi, but Rockhill himself dismisses this comparison as superficial; Bon bears much more similarity to Buddhism than Taoism in terms of its present doctrine, dress, monasteries, and so on. Rockhill does not go as far as Kawaguchi in identifying Bon and Buddhism, for Bon contains non-Buddhist indigenous theories and practices that antedate Buddhism, and he adds that they are especially proficient in "juggling and magic." See *Land of the Lamas*, p. 217-218, n. 2. The views about Bon and Taoism expressed by the Chinese (and western scholars) that Rockhill sought to discredit remained quite popular, as noted by the Chinese scholar Tsung-lien Shen, in his book *Tibet and the Tibetans* (Stanford University Press, 1953, reprinted in New York, Octagon Books, 1973), p. 37: "Bon-Po, one form of Shamanism, is considered by some scholars to be a Tibetan copy of a later decadent phase of Chinese Taoism. It lacked depth, having, in default of a philosophical base, a mixture of exorcism and primitive worship. However, by borrowing too freely from the abundance of Buddhism, it was not long before Bon-Po lost its own characteristics and became absorbed into its rival." This particular genealogy of "original" Bon sees it as derived

from a decadent phase of Chinese Taoism, with very few distinctively Tibetan features except perhaps its mixture of exorcism and primitive worship.

[29] Thu'u bkvan, *Thu'u bkvan grub mtha'*, pp. 412 ff.

[30] Cited in Hajime Nakamura, *Ways of Thinking of Eastern Peoples*, p. 333.

[31] The act of comparison is an intellectual operation, and thus the realization of similarity (or difference) is not "natural" or "given," although it might be experienced by the comparativist as such. Jonathan Z. Smith makes this point quite clearly: "In the case of religion, as in the case of any disciplined inquiry, comparison, in its strongest form, brings differences together within the space of the scholar's mind for the scholar's own intellectual reasons. It is the scholar who makes their cohabitation—their 'sameness'—possible, not 'natural' affinities or processes of history. Taken in this sense, 'genealogy' disguises and obscures the scholar's interests and activities allowing the illusion of passive observation (what Nietzsche has termed [*Zarathustra* 2.15], the 'myth of the immaculate perception')." See *Drudgery Divine: On the Comparison of Early Christianity and the Religions of Late Antiquity*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), p. 51.

[32] Jonathan Z. Smith, *Imagining Religion: From Babylon to Jonestown* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), p. 22.

[33] Cited by Donald Lopez in "'Lamaism' and the Disappearance of Tibet," p. 11. Much of my discussion of demonic plagiarism is borrowed (or plagiarized?) from this article.

[34] Here I am indebted again to Jonathan Z. Smith who made the following observation in his University lecture in Religion at Arizona State University entitled "Differential Equations: On Constructing the 'Other." "Rather than the remote "other" being perceived as problematic and/or dangerous, it is the proximate "other", the near neighbor, who is most troublesome. That is to say, while difference or "otherness" may be perceived as LIKE-US or NOT-LIKE-US, it becomes most problematic when it is TOO-MUCH-LIKE-US or when it claims to BE-US." Cited by William Scott Green in "The Difference Religion Makes," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* LXII: 4 (Winter, 1994), p. 1205.

[35] In *The Book of Ser Marco Polo* (1870), translated and edited by Sir Henry Yule, there is a note written by Yule on Marco Polo's description of a group of extreme ascetics who ate nothing but bran mixed with water and who wore black and blue hemp robes. Yule identifies this as a reference to the Tibetan Bonpos, and he summarizes all that is known about this religion. He mentions a missionary named Rev. Gabriel Durand who visited a Bonpo monastery in Tsodam (Tsaidam?) Eastern Tibet in June 1863. The Rev. Durand wrote, "In this temple are the *monstrous idols* of the sect of Peunbo; horrid figures, whose features only Satan could have inspired. They are disposed about the enclosure according to their power and their seniority. Above the pagoda is a loft, the nooks of which are crammed with all kinds of diabolical trumpery; little idols of wood or copper,

hideous masques of men and animals, superstitious Lama vestments, drums, trumpets of human bones, sacrificial vessels, in short, all the utensils with which the devil's servants in Tibet honour their master." One of the "monstrous idols" he identifies as that of *Tamba-Shi-Rob*, the great doctor of the sect of the Peunbo," that is, Ston pa Gshen rab. This might be the first clear description of a Bon monastery by a missionary, and in it we see the same rhetoric of the demonic, and demonic plagiarism at work.

[36] Waddell, *Tibetan Buddhism*, pp. viii-ix. For another view of Waddell, see Donald Lopez, "Foreigner at the Lama's Feet," *Curators of the Buddha: The Study of Buddhism Under Colonialism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), pp. 259-263.

[37] Waddell, *Tibetan Buddhism*, pp. 28-9.

[38] Waddell, *Tibetan Buddhism*, p. xi. Later on pages 29-30 Waddell returns to his metaphor of surfaces and depths to describe how Indian Buddhism mixed with Bon to form Lamaism: "And to this highly impure form of [Indian] Buddhism, already covered by so many foreign accretions and saturated with so much demonolatry, was added a portion of the ritual and most of the demons of the indigenous Bön-pa [sic.] religion, and each of the demons was assigned its proper place in the Lamaists pantheon. Primitive Lamaism may therefore be defined as a priestly mixture of Śaivite mysticism, magic, and Indo-Tibetan demonolatry, overlaid by a thin varnish of Mahāyāna Buddhism. And to the present day Lamaism still retains this character."

[39] For Waddell's discussion of how the noble and human teachings of Śākyamuni Buddha came to be corrupted with supernaturalism, ritualism, idolatry, metaphysical speculation, and sexual perversion found in Mahāyāna and Tantric Buddhism, see his first chapter "Changes in Primitive Buddhism Leading to Lamaism," in *The Buddhism of Tibet, or Lamaism*, pp. 5-17. For an analysis of Waddell's historical model of degeneration, see Donald Lopez, "Foreigner at the Lama's Feet," pp. 259-263.

[40] Waddell, *The Buddhism of Tibet, or Lamaism*, pp. 18-19.

[41] Waddell, *The Buddhism of Tibet, or Lamaism*, p. 566.

[42] These descriptions of Tibet and the Tibetans all appear in the *Bka' thang sde lnga*, namely the *Lha 'dre bka' thang*, the *Rgyal po'i bka' thang*, the *Tsun mo bka' thang*, as well as the *Ma ṇi bka' 'bum*. All are quoted by Rolf A. Stein in *Tibetan Civilization* trans. by J. E. Stapleton Driver (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1972), pp. 40-1. Also see Janet Gyatso, "Down With the Demoness: Reflections on a Feminine Ground in Tibet," *Tibet Journal* 12.4 (Winter 1987), p. 38.

[43] Waddell, *The Buddhism of Tibet, or Lamaism*, p. 153.

[44] Waddell's views on Buddhism are very much of his times, a Victorian evaluation based on a textual ideal, as summarized by Philip Almond: "The image of decay,

decadence, and degeneration emerged as a result of the possibility of contrasting an ideal textual Buddhism of the past with its contemporary Eastern instances. Simultaneously, this provided an ideological justification for the missionary enterprises of a progressive, thriving Christianity against a Buddhism now debilitated." *The British Discovery of Buddhism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), p. 40.

[45] Chögyam Trungpa, "Some Aspects of Pön," *Himalayan Anthropology: The Indo-Tibetan Interface*, ed. by James F. Fisher (The Hague: Mouton Publishers, 1978), p. 306. He writes: "The investigation of the Pön religion is further complicated by what is called in Tibet "white Pön," which is what amounts to a Pönnized Buddhism. In "white Pön," Buddhism has been adopted basically, but Buddha is called Shenrap, the Buddhist *vajra* is replaced by an anticlockwise swastika, and the bodhisattva is called *yungdrungsempa* [yungdrumsems-pa], that is *swastikasattva*. Where a text mentions "dharma," the word "pön" is substituted. There are Pön equivalent names for all the Buddhas and bodhisattvas, and also for the ten stages of the Bodhisattva Path, that is, the Sanskrit *bhumis*. The contemporary Pön believer is therefore a poor source of information concerning the pure tradition of his religion."

[46] Charles Bell, *The Religion of Tibet* (Oxford University Press, 1931, reprinted in Delhi by Motilal Banarsidass, 1992), p. 8.

[47] Bell, *The Religion of Tibet*, p. 10.

[48] Charles Bell, *The Religion of Tibet*, p. 10. On page 15 he adds; "If one seeks for the nearest approach to the old Pönist faith, he will find it among the aboriginal tribes of the eastern Himalaya and western China, and among Tibetan tribes, such as the people of Po in south-eastern Tibet, who live in close contact with these aborigines or in similar surroundings."

[49] Alexandra David-Neel, in her *Magic and Mystery in Tibet* (originally published as *Mystiques et magiciens du Thibet* Plon: Paris, 1929, English translation Claude Kendall, New York, 1932, reprinted by Dover 1971), repeatedly states that one can find evidence of Bon, "the shamanist aborigine," still practiced in the remote regions on the frontiers of Tibet. See pp. 36-39. One of the tribes of western China mentioned by Bell, the Mosso, were later studied by Joseph Rock, who found remnants there, and especially in the neighboring Na-khi, of ancient Bon practices. In fact, one reason why Rock spent so many years learning to decipher the pictographic texts of the Na-khi is that he believed that their literature was "of purely Bon origin." Drawn to the Na-khi's pictographic script, which he saw as based on primitive symbols of nature, he was convinced that the texts were Bon fossils, and the Na-khi living remnants of the ancient Bon religion of Shamanism. See Joseph Francis Rock, *The Na-khi Nāga Cult and Related Ceremonies*, (Roma: Istituto Italiano Per Il medio ed Estremo Oriente, 1952). For a critique of Rock's identification of the Na-khi literature and ancient Bon, see Anthony Jackson, "Tibetan Bön Rites in China: A Case of Cultural Diffusion," *Himalayan Anthropology: The Indo-*

Tibetan Interface, ed. by James F. Fisher (The Hague: Mouton Publishers, 1978), pp. 309-325.

[50] Edward Burnett Tylor, *Primitive Culture: Researched into the Development of Mythology, Philosophy, Religion, Art, and Custom* 2 Volumes (London: Murray, 1873, 1874). On this theory of "survivals," see Margaret T. Hogden, *The Doctrine of Survivals: A Chapter in the History of Scientific Method in the Study of Man* (London: Allenson, 1936).

[51] Tomoko Masuzawa, *In Search of Dreamtime: The Quest for the Origin of Religion* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), p. 32.

[52] The distinction between "ethical" and "natural" religion was first introduced by the Dutch phenomenologist Cornelius Petrus Tiele (1830-1902).

[53] Ekai Kawaguchi identifies two valuable characteristics in the "creed" of the Tibetans: 1) they recognize the existence of a superhuman being and protector; 2) their belief in the law of cause and effect. *Three Years in Tibet*, p. 561. Sarat Chandra Das devotes an entire lecture to the "Doctrine of Transmigration" in *Indian Pandits in the Land of Snow*, where he notes that the interest in causality has so penetrated the Tibetan popular consciousness that "the priesthood has constructed elaborate works on the art of divination, an necromancy, based on astrology." Das's point here seems somewhat critical of the role assumed by the "priests" of "Lamaism;" but he also adds that the Lama meditates on the transcendental virtues of the Bodhisattva, and "with indifference, [they] dismiss the doctor and endeavor to become lost in meditation for the purpose of being restored to a higher stage of human existence after death." (pp. 81-2). Waddell generously notes of Lamaism that "notwithstanding its glaring defects, Lamaism has exerted a considerable civilizing influence over the Tibetans. The people are profoundly affected by its benign ethics, and its maxim, "as a man sows he shall reap," has undoubtedly enforced the personal duty of mastery over self in spite of the easier physical aids to piety which are prevalent." *The Buddhism of Tibet*, p. 154. Thus the individualistic ethical orientation of karma appeals to these writers as a civilizing force on the Tibetans' collective psyche.

[54] Mircea Eliade, *Shamanism: Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy* (Originally published in French as *Le Chamanisme et les techniques archaïques de l'extase*, Paris: Librarie Payot, 1951; revised and enlarged in the translation by Willard R. Trask, Princeton: Bollingen, 1972), p. 5.

[55] Eliade, *Shamanism*, pp. 505-507.

[56] Eliade, *Shamanism*, p. 433, where he cites Helmut Hoffmann's translation of the *Collected Songs of Milarepa* in his *Quellen zur Geschichte der tibetischen Bon-Religion* Akademie der Wissenschaften und der Literatur in Mainz, Franz Steiner Verlag (Wiesbaden, 1950), p. 275; also see Hoffmann, *The Religions of Tibet* (originally published as *Die Religionen Tibets* Karl Alber Verlag, 1956, English edition translated by Edward Fitzgerald, Macmillan, 1961), pp. 98-9; Réne de Nebesky-Wojkowitz, *Oracles*

and Demons of Tibet: The Cult and Iconography of the Tibetan Protective Deities (The Hague: Mouton Publishers, 1956; reprinted in Kathmandu: Tiwari's Pilgrim Book House, 1993), p. 542. Also see Nebesky-Wojkowitz, "Die tibetische Bön-Religion," *Archiv für Völkerkunde* II (Vienna, 1947), p. 38.

57 Eliade, *Shamanism*, p. 433.

58 Eliade, *Shamanism*, pp. 274 ff. Nebesky-Wojkowitz, *Oracles and Demons of Tibet*, pp. 538-9; Hoffmann, *The Religions of Tibet*, pp. 19-20.

59 See Nebesky-Wojkowitz, *Oracles and Demons of Tibet*, pp. 542-553; Eliade, *Shamanism*, pp. 177 ff.; Hoffmann, *Quellen*, pp. 201 ff.

60 Eliade, *Shamanism*, p. 145.

61 This phrase appears in many Bon texts, with some variation. The version quoted appears in Shar rdza Bkra shis Rgyal mtshan's *Legs bshad rin po che'i mdzod* (*A Precious Treasury of Good Sayings*) (Beijing: Mi rigs dpe skrun khang, 1985), p. 170.12ff; but also see *Rgyal rabs Bon gyi 'byung gnas* (from *Three Sources for a History of Bon*), p. 115.4 ff; *G.yung drung Bon gyi rgyud 'bum*, p. 22.1ff; and Spa stan Rgyal bzang po's *Bstan pa'i rnam bshad dar rgyas gsal ba'i sgron me* (Beijing: Krung go'i bod kyi shes rig dpe skrun khang, 1991), p. 141.18ff.

62 *Rgyal rabs Bon gyi 'byung gnas* p. 116.3 ff. For a shorter version, see *G.yung drung Bon gyi rgyud 'bum*, p. 22.3; *Legs bshad rin po che'i mdzod* p. 171.5ff; *Bstan pa'i rnam bshad dar rgyas gsal ba'i sgron me*, p. 142.13ff; *Sgra 'grel* (or *Bden pa bon gyi mdzod sgo sgra 'grel 'phrul gyi lde mig* in *Srid pa'i mdzod phugs kyi rtsa 'grel* (Sarnath: Central Institute of Higher Tibetan Studies, Yungdrung Bon Student's Committee, 1993), p. 23.18ff. The term "bird horn" (*bya ru*) is not a koan, nor is it one of those stock phrases quoted in Tibetan monastic debate to illustrate non-existent phenomena (such as "the horns of a rabbit" or "bird tracks in the sky"). Rather, the literal referent for the term *bya ru* are the horns that appear on the head of the mythical *khyung* bird, the bird most sacred to the Bonpos, which became identified with the Indian *garuda*. However, more commonly *bya ru* refers to a device found atop the finials of Bon chortens. But in this context it appears that the "bird horn" is a symbol of royalty. For a discussion of this symbol, see Giuseppe Tucci, *The Religions of Tibet* pp. 237-8; Roberto Vitali, *The Kingdoms of Gu.ge Pu.hrang* (Dharamsala, 1996), pp. 162-164; and Dan Martin, *The Emergence of Bon and the Tibetan Polemical Tradition*, pp. 118-137. Both Vitali and Martin argue that the bird horn is a royal symbol that originates from Persia, where the Sassanid kings wore winged crowns. Martin speculates that this might be the inspiration for the Bon "bird horns," but he has a difficult time accounting for how these crowns traveled into Tibet, for there is no evidence of their transmission there. It seems that the winged Persian crowns flew into Zhang zhung and Tibet on their own accord, and any attempt to trace their path is like looking for "bird tracks in the sky."

[63] For Eliade's analysis of the Buriat shaman's white fur, see *Shamanism*, p. 150. The fur of a white lion is not only found as an emblem of distinction in the Bon tradition, for Buddhist historical texts also present it as a mark of honor. See Dpa' bo Gstug lag phreng ba's *Mkhas pa'i dga' ston*, ed. by Rdo rje Rgyal po (Beijing: Mi rigs dpe skrun khang, 1986), p. 379.2-3, where a collar made from the fur of a white lion was awarded to a member of the powerful 'Bro clan; another passage cited by Vitali in *Kingdoms* p. 169 n. 231 comes from the earlier Buddhist text, *Lde'u jo sras chos 'byung* (Lhasa: Bod ljongs mi rigs dpe skrun khang, 1987), p. 112.8-12., where it is stated that another member of the 'Bro clan "owned the white lion fur collar. This was his sign of greatness." From these two examples, Vitali concludes that the white lion fur denotes the 'Bro clan, as its special mark of distinction. Such a conclusion would certainly be contested by the Bonpos, who offer their own etiology for the white lion fur.

[64] *G.yung drung Bon gyi rgyud 'bum*, p. 30.4-31.4.

[65] For a revisionist perspective on the shaman and his political role, see *Shamanism, History and the State* ed. by Nicholas Thomas and Caroline Humphrey (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994).

[66] Eliade, *Shamanism*, p. 434.

[67] Eliade, *Shamanism*, p. 440-441.

[68] Eliade, *Shamanism*, p. 437: "These few extracts suffice to show the transformation that a shamanic schema can undergo when it is incorporated into a complex philosophical system, such as tantrism. Important for our purpose is the survival of certain shamanic symbols and methods even in highly elaborated techniques of meditation oriented to goals other than ecstasy. All this, in our opinion, sufficiently illustrates the genuineness and the initiatory spiritual value of many shamanic experiences."

[69] Réne de Nebesky-Wojkowitz, *Oracles and Demons of Tibet*, p. vii.

[70] Nebesky-Wojkowitz, , *Oracles and Demons of Tibet*, pp. 440, 547. He adds that "I have often been asked by Tibetans the question what I thought of their mediums, and whether I had the impression that really some supernatural forces were manifesting themselves in the course of these ceremonies." While he never tells us his answer, as if doing so would violate his "objectivity" as a scientist and transgress the phenomenologist's ideal of *epochê*, his own skepticism is apparent.

[71] Debunking the Tibetan shaman and his magic may be hazardous to one's health.

[72] Hoffmann, *The Religions of Tibet*, pp. 13-14.

[73] Hoffmann, *The Religions of Tibet*, pp. 14-15.

[74] Hoffmann, *The Religions of Tibet*, p. 85.

[75] Hoffmann, *The Religions of Tibet*, p. 25.

[76] Hoffmann, *Tibet: A Handbook* (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1975), p. 102. For a critical assessment of the Manichean and Iranian influences on Bon, see Per Kvaerne, "Dualism in Tibetan Cosmogonic Myths and the Question of Iranian Influence," in *Silver on Lapis: Tibetan Literary Culture and History* ed. by Christopher I. Beckwith (Bloomington: The Tibet Society, 1987), pp. 163-174.

[77] Hoffmann, *The Religions of Tibet*, p. 98. On page 74 he adds: "The later Bon-po led an isolated existence apart from the main stream of spiritual development as a discarded heretical sect, as a provincial tendency in religious belief whose main tendency was and still is a purely negative one, namely anti-Buddhist." The trope of "reversal" or "inversion" is a common motif used in popular literature to dismiss or disparage Bon. Helmut Hoffmann's countryman, Ernst Hoffman, better known under his self-appointed name Lama Anagarika Govinda, writes in his *The Way of the White Clouds* (Boulder: Shambhala, 1970), p. 223: "Since it is only the Bon-pos who reverse the direction of the cicumambulation or who pass a shrine or sacred place (as for instance Mount Kailaś) with the left shoulder towards it, our suspicion that the abbot was not a Buddhist but a Bon-po was confirmed, and when we entered the main temple our last doubt vanished, because everything we saw seemed to be a reversal or at least a distortion of Buddhist tradition. Thus the swastika sign of the Bon-pos points to the left, while the Buddhist one points to the right." Likewise, Fosco Maraini expresses his sense of discomfort when visiting a Bon temple, where everything is backwards: "If first impressions are to be trusted, I do not like the Bon religion. There is something uncanny about it, though that is only an impression, I repeat. Perhaps it's the feeling that it is a primitive religion, which only came to have proper temples, scriptures, ceremonial, and art because of contact with its Buddhist neighbor. Finally there is the fact that no great human spirit has expressed himself in it—a sure sign of inferiority. Its spaces have never been illuminated—they have remained gloomy and nocturnal." Maraini then goes on to describe how savage and "robustly barbarous" ancient Tibet was with its Bon religion. See his *Secret Tibet* (New York: Viking Press, 1952), p. 204.

[78] Per Kvaerne, "The Bon Religion of Tibet: A Survey of Research," *The Buddhist Forum* vol. III, ed. by Tadeusz Skorupski and Ulrich Pagel (University of London, School of Oriental and African Studies, 1994), p. 133.

[79] Rolf Stein, *Tibetan Civilization*, p. 191. Stein addresses the problem of locating Tibet's indigenous religion, and how it differs from both Buddhism (or Lamaism) and Bon: "It would be a mistake to suppose, however, that all non-Buddhist elements absorbed by Lamaism in Tibet were indigenous. Tibetan historians themselves have clouded the issue by constantly mixing up two separate points: the fact that Bon was there before Buddhism, and the judgment that everything preceding the latter religion was naturally

'barbarous', uncivilized and appropriate to an age of darkness. Hence the somewhat over-simplified conclusion drawn by early European students, who tended to present Bon as the primitive religion of Tibet. Further, by equating 'primitive' with 'savage,' everything in Lamaism that seemed frightening, twisted and demonic or mediumistic soon came to be regarded as Bonpo and primitive. From that to describing it all as 'Shamanism' was but a step. The truth is more complex. It is often impossible to tell which of Lamaism's not specifically Buddhist elements is indigenous and which foreign, which one was really Bonpo and which was not." Stein here presents a very clear analysis of European misconceptions of "primitive" Bon and how Buddhist texts have lent support for these misunderstandings.

[80] Giuseppe Tucci, *The Religions of Tibet*, trans. by Geoffrey Samuel, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), pp. 163-212. It first appeared as *Die Religionen Tibets unde der Mongolei* by Tucci and Walther Heissig, (Stuttgart, 1970).

[81] Rolf Stein, *Tibetan Civilization*, p. 241.

[82] Giuseppe Tucci, *The Religions of Tibet*, p. 224.

[83] Tucci himself insists that the model of religious development found in the CMDS corresponds to an "inner law", namely that the tradition develops naturally from its primordial state to a more sophisticated religion, overseen by a priestly class with unique powers distinct from the king's. He explains on p. 224 of *The Religions of Tibet* that "from a primitive starting-point of purely magical or shamanistic character, varying from place to place, we come in the time of Gri-gum (who doubtless indicates an especially significant factor in the development of the Bon religion) to the first beginnings of an organizational process probably brought about through the contrast between the royal authority and the magical powers of Bon." Such a statement about the "inner law" of religious evolution is revealing, not so much for its insight into the actual development of Bon, nor as an explanation of what Thu'u bkvan "really meant." Rather, it tells us that Tucci (like so many earlier historians of religion) regarded this model as a universal pattern for explaining change in "primitive" religions.

[84] Stein, *Tibetan Civilization*, p. 232. Stein uses the CMDS historical overview of Bon a bit more critically than the other scholars discussed, although not any more sparingly. His method for reconstructing the history of Bon relies upon the narratives present in Thu'u bkvan's text as well as in other Tibetan Buddhist histories. He enumerates all three phases of Bon development, but devotes most of his attention to the second and third phases. He refuses to speculate about the nature of what he calls "revealed Bon," and to his credit, he eschews the categories of animism and shamanism altogether. Yet when narrating the second phase of "deviant Bon" he presents the story of the three foreign Bonpos being invited to Tibet as if it were a historical event. Furthermore, he suggests that Thu'u bkvan's theory of Śaivite influence is plausible, adding on page 247 that Taoist, Manichaean, and Gnostic influences are possible as well

[85] Tucci writes in *The Religions of Tibet*, p. 218: "Nothing however allows one to define Bon as a religion characterized exclusively by the worship of heaven. Such worship only takes place in special circumstances and at particular moments, that is when there is mention of a *gnam bon* a "Bon of heaven." Then again on p. 246 he writes: "One scarcely does justice to the old Bon religion if one affirms it is a religion of the sky, although certain Bon concepts (e.g. *gnam bon*) could justify this name." Tucci's criticism here is explicitly directed against Hoffmann, but Hoffmann was simply reinforcing Eliade's theory that shamanism must have a sky or heaven orientation for its supreme being ideology. In both Buddhist and Bon polemical literature one way the Tibetan writer would dismiss his opponents was to claim that they "like the sky/heaven" (*gnam la dga'*). This phrase is used by both Nelpa Pandita and Sum pa mkhan po in reference to Bonpos, when Bonpos advance the claim that the very first king of Tibet, Gnya' khri btsan po, descended from the sky, rather than from a royal lineage traced back to India. In their polemic, "liking the sky" is a mark of primitivism, perhaps comparable to the 19th century images of primitive "nature worship." The phrase evokes the naïve reverence paid to the skies or heavens, a mundane focus on the visible. Bon writers themselves also used this polemical strategy, as Kvaerne noted in the *Gzi brjid* there is a rejection of Mongolian religious practices as based simply on reverence for heaven. See Per Kvaerne's article "Mongols and Khitans in a 14th-century Tibetan Bonpo Text," *Acta Orientalia Hungaricae* 34 (1980), pp. 89.

[86] Tucci, *The Religions of Tibet*, p. 241.

[87] Stein, *Tibetan Civilization*, p. 238.

[88] Stein, *Tibetan Civilization*, p. 235. Also see note 18 above.

[89] Samten Karmay, "A General Introduction to the History and Doctrines of Bon" in *Memoires of the Research Department of the Toyo Bunko*, vol. 33, (1975), pp. 171-218.

[90] David Snellgrove, *The Nine Ways of Bon*, p. 2.

[91] For some revisionist interpretations of fetishism as a useful category in anthropological discourse, see Emily Apter and William Pietz, eds. *Fetishism as Cultural Discourse* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993).

[92] Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Totemism*, trans. by Rodney Needham (Boston: Beacon Press, 1963), p. 15.

[93] Lévi-Strauss, *Totemism*, p. 3.

[94] Geoffrey Samuel, "Early Buddhism in Tibet: Some Anthropological Perspectives" in *Soundings in Tibetan Civilization*, ed. by Barbara Nimri Aziz and Matthew Kapstein, (Delhi: Manohar Publications, 1985), pp. 384,

[95] David H. Holmberg, *Lama, Shaman, and Lambu in Tamang Religious Practice,* unpublished Ph.D dissertation (Cornell University, 1980), p. 288. Holmberg quotes a ritual recitation of the Tamang bombo "shaman," who affirm their own identity with the ancient Bon lineage of Tibet: "I [am] of the ancients. Watch in front, watch within. Ancient to ancient, Bon to bon.... I am the bon of an ancient trunk, the branch in a line. I am in the pillar of a bon."

[96] Stan Royal Mumford, *Himalayan Dialogue: Tibetan Lamas and Gurung Shamans in Nepal* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1989), pp. 52-3.

[97] Robert Paul, "Some Observations on Sherpa Shamanism" in *Spirit Possession in the Nepal Himalaya*, ed. by John Hitchcock and Rex Jones (Delhi: Vikas Publishing Co., 1976), p. 141-152. For a more recent study of the Yolmo Sherpa shamans, see Robert R. Desjarlais, *Body and Emotion: The Aesthetics of Illness and Healing in the Nepal Himalayas* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1992).

[98] Mumford, *Himalayan Dialogue*, pp. 7, 12, 30-1.

[99] Paul, "Some Observations on Sherpa Shamanism," p. 149.

[100] Bernard Faure, *The Rhetoric of Immediacy: A Cultural Critique of Chan/Zen Buddhism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991).

[101] Mumford, *Himayalan Dialogue*, p. 53.

[102] Mumford, *Himalayan Dialogue*, p. 246.

[103] See for instance Robert Desjarlais, *Body and Emotion: The Aesthetics of Illness and Healing in the Nepal Himalayas.*

[104] Holmberg, *Order in Paradox*, p. 149.

[105] Holmberg, *Order in Paradox*, pp. 167, 216, 221.

[106] Geoffrey Samuel, *Civilized Shamans: Buddhism in Tibetan Societies* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1993), p. 435

[107] Samuel, *Civilized Shamans*, p. 8.

[108] Samuel, *Civilized Shamans*, p. 34.

[109] One of the most popular handbooks for learning shamanic practices is Michael Harner's *The Way of the Shaman* (New York: Harper and Row, 1980).

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[110] For a very insightful analysis of western neo-shamanism or parashamanism, see Ronald L. Grimes' chapter on "Parashamanism" in the revised edition of *Beginnings in Ritual Studies* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1995), pp. 253-268.

[111] Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1978), p. 6.

[112] Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1993), p. 58.

[113] For example, two of the most well-known Tibetan scholars in exile, Samten Karmay and Tsultrim Kelsang Khangkar, have accepted the term "Lamaism" as an appropriate term for describing the Lama-based Buddhism of Tibet. See K. Dhondup's interview of Tsultrim Kelsang appearing as "'Lamaism' is an Appropriate Term" in *Tibetan Review* 13.6 (June 1978), pp. 18-19. Likewise, Tenzin Namdak, perhaps the leading scholar of Bon living in exile, has come to embrace the term "shamanism" to describe Bon.

[114] I borrow the phrases "elective affinities" and "intercultural mimesis" from Charles Hallisey's article "Roads Taken and Not Taken in the Study of Theravada Buddhism" in *Curators of the Buddha: The Study of Buddhism Under Colonialism*, ed. by Donald Lopez (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), pp. 31-61. Hallisey defines intercultural mimesis as "when some aspect of a culture of a subjectified people influenced or otherwise enabled the investigator to represent that culture." (p. 34). For a recent application of this model to Buddhist studies, see Richard King's *Orientalism and Religion: Postcolonial Theory, India and 'The Mystic East'* (London: Routledge, 1999), and especially his section on "Intercultural Mimesis and the Local Production of Meaning," pp. 148-160.

[115] Homi Bhabha, "Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse" in *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994), p. 92.

[116] Bhabha, "Of Mimicry and Men," p. 86.

[117] Robert Young, "The Ambivalence of Bhabha" in *White Mythologies: Writing History and the West*, p. 148.

[118] Namkhai Norbu catalogues these common misrepresentations of Bonpos in *The Necklace of gZi: A Cultural History of Tibet* (Dharamsala: Narthang Publications, 1981), p. 20. Also see Norbu's forward (*sngon brjod*) in *Sgrung lde'u bon gsum gyi gtam e ma ho* (Dharamsala: Library of Tibetan Works and Archives, 1989), pp. 7-18, where he also criticizes the common Tibetan prejudices against Bon, in a section that is missing in the English translation by Clemente and Lukianowicz.

[119] Jacques Lacan, "The Line and Light" in *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis* trans. by Alan Sheridan (London: The Hogarth Press, 1977), p. 99; Lacan is quoted in Bhabha's "Of Mimicry and Man", p. 85.

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[120] *Srid pa'i rgyud kyi kha byang chen mo: A Bonpo Cosmological-Historical Work Revealed by Khod-spo Blo-gros-thogs-med*, ed. by Tenzin Namdak (Dolanji: Tibetan Bonpo Monastic Center, 1976), ff. 43a4. This passage is quoted in the *Legs bshad mdzod* 173b-174a), and translated by Samten Karmay in *The Treasury of Good Sayings*, p. 91.

[121] Anne-Marie Blondeau, "Le Lha-'dre bka'-thang" in *Études Tibétaines dédiées à la mémoire de Marcelle Lalou* ed. by Ariane Macdonald (Paris: Librarie d'Amérique et d'Orient, 1971), p. 47.

[122] Salman Rushdie, "In Good Faith" from *Imaginary Homelands: Essays and Criticism 1981-1991* (London: Granta Books, 1991), p. 394.

[123] See note 18 above.

[124] Milarepa, *Rnal 'byor gyi dbang phyug chen po mi la ras pa'i rnam mgur* (Dharamsala: Tibetan Cultural Press, 1990), pp. 399-415. For an English translation of this episode, see Garma C.C. Chang *The Hundred Thousand Songs of Milarepa*, vol. I (Boston: Shambhala, 1962), pp. 242-258.

CHAPTER III

TIBETAN NATIVISM AND THE QUEST FOR INDIGENOUS BON

One of the consequences of the Chinese colonization of Tibet that began in the 1950s has been the emergence of a new national identity for Tibetans. A few Tibetologists have begun to examine the complex rol̀e that Buddhism has played in the formation of national identity within Tibet today.[1] However, the bulk of scholarly attention has focused on the construction of Tibetan identity in exile.[2] In Dharamsala, the Dalai Lama and his government-in-exile have been busy salvaging their cultural traditions and forging a nationalist ethos based on Buddhism. The religious dimension of their patriotic agenda is apparent in the educational institutions reconstructed outside Tibet: all the government supported monasteries, schools, and Tibetan research institutions teach that Buddhism is the basis of Tibet's unique culture. The nationalist narratives taught to the younger generation of Tibetans celebrate their country's Buddhist history, beginning with the arrival of the Dharma in Tibet and its recognition as the state religion by the Dharma kings (*chos rgyal*), followed later by the enlightened (and autonomous) reign of the Dalai Lamas. By promoting Tibet's noble Buddhist history and then underscoring its imminent demise under Chinese communist rule, the Dalai Lama and other lamas have sought political and financial support from their western audiences, while countering the Chinese depiction of Buddhism in Tibet as a feudalistic and superstitious creed. Many sympathetic western Buddhists and scholars, for whom the plight of the Dharma in Tibet has a special urgency, have responded by adding their own voices to Tibet's new anthem, eulogizing the country's Buddhist past.

But there are a few Tibetan historians who have boldly voiced their dissent against the traditional Buddhist perspective on Tibet's past. These scholars locate the source of their national identity in Tibet's pre-Buddhist culture, and especially in the religion of Bon. This chapter will examine some of the alternative memories of the past that have been evoked by these controversial scholars. Their voices have generally gone unheard and unheeded, though occasionally the Tibetan establishment has actively silenced them. Their studies of early Tibetan history have been heard by western Tibetologists though, and in Bon studies especially scholars have responded to their revisionist representations of the past with varying degrees of sympathy. I will first identify some of the general features of this Tibetan "nativist" historiography, understood as a form of contemporary identity politics; next we will examine some of the prominent nativist themes found in the work of three prominent Tibetan historians, Gendun Chophel, Samten Karmay and Namkhai Norbu; then we will shift our attention back to the western scholars whose work has been affected by the modern nativist's quest for Tibet's origins; and finally, I will consider what political and intellectual value there is in analyzing Buddhist/Bon historical identity, and in interpreting the effects of mimetic exchange.

The General Contours of Tibetan Nativist Historiography

Two prominent characteristics of what I am calling modern "nativist" historiography are its revisionist and polemical orientation. Perhaps the most striking feature is that Bon is celebrated as the religion that supported an ancient flourishing civilization in Tibet, while Buddhism comes under attack for contributing to its downfall. Bon is credited with the achievements of the Zhang zhung and Yarlung empires, when Tibetans ruled much of central Asia and posed a serious military threat to China. The unashamed glorification of Tibet's imperial past and its military achievements offers

these nationalists some compensation for Tibet's humiliating present. These scholars may be characterized as "nativists" for their interest in recuperating Tibet's origins as a great civilization, whether it be identified with the martial achievements of the Yarlung empire (as for Gendun Chophel), or discovered in the indigenous Bon religion that supported the imperial lines in Tibet and Zhang zhung (as Samten Karmay and Namkhai Norbu believe). Their wish to promote Tibet as a culturally developed country, with its own written language, its own "sciences" of medicine and astrology, its own cult of divine royalty and imposing military techniques—all prior to the recognition of Buddhism as Tibet's official religion—presents a radical departure from what is taught in contemporary Buddhist histories. For these nativists bent on uncovering the origins of what is "really" Tibetan, the investigation of ancient Tibet, Zhang zhung, and Bon becomes an intellectual expression of their patriotism.

In their revisionist perspective, the Buddhism imported from India only proved harmful to the Tibetan empire, once it was adopted as the state religion. It is argued that Buddhist ideals (such as non-violence and pacifism) undermined the Tibetans' ardent patriotism, and Buddhism is consequently blamed as partially responsible for the disintegration of the Yarlung empire. Related to this reassessment of Buddhism, the value of traditional Buddhist historiography also comes to be questioned. It is criticized especially for its tendency to dismiss Tibet's indigenous culture as backward, uncivilized, and inferior overall to Indian Buddhist culture. In particular, the strong Indocentric bias found in Buddhist histories is deemed an obstacle for recognizing the positive, enduring traits of Tibetan culture. Yet unlike other nativist movements found in Asia, these scholars are not so radical (or rash) to suggest that the Buddhist past needs to be purged entirely, as a foreign accretion. Rather, Buddhist representations of the past are simply criticized for denying anything of intrinsic value to Tibet, and this bias requires rectification, with ample evidence from other sources of Tibet's own great indigenous culture. These historians turn to alternative sources for reconstructing Tibet's past, such

as Dunhuang texts, ancient inscriptions, and even non-Tibetan historical sources. But in particular they rely on Bon texts, with varying degrees of critical distance.

Underlying these scholars' work is the premise that Tibet's ancient past is relevant to the present dire situation. The continuity of Tibet's cultural traditions is assumed or explicitly asserted, a continuity that is only now being threatened by the presence of Chinese colonizers in Tibet. Namkhai Norbu comes closest to establishing a theory of cultural continuity. In an article on the origins of Tibetan culture he affirms:

> Culture is a genealogical product: man is the beneficiary of culture, and the relationship between a given culture and a given race is united by strong links. For an evaluation and understanding of any culture, its origins, influence and prevalence, it is imperative, therefore, to appraise and study the genealogical history of the specific cultural group.[3]

Norbu here connects the Tibetan race, nation, and culture through a genealogical history that is handed down through the generations, binding all those in the nation with a common heritage. Such a notion of genealogical history denies any significant change that occurs from generation to generation, and it assumes that homogeneity results from cultural continuity. What distinguishes Norbu's version of history and homogeneity from other contemporary Buddhist nationalist narratives are the traits he identifies as evidence for cultural continuity and their source in ancient Bon and the civilization of Zhang zhung. He notes that when the bonds of Tibetan identity are forcefully severed, as may be seen in the current Chinese policy of cultural genocide, it becomes necessary to revitalize the culture by returning to its pure ancestral roots, to the indigenous values and practices that make up what is "truly Tibetan." Norbu describes the threat of Tibetan cultural assimilation by the Chinese today, who greatly outnumber the Tibetans:

> The Tibetan people and culture may be destined to vanish. The only way to save the identity of a people is to preserve its culture, and in order to appraise the culture of a country to enable it to survive it is necessary to search for its genuine roots, which in Tibet's case undoubtedly derive from the ancient Bon tradition and civilization of Shang Shung [Zhang zhung].[4]

I would argue that contemporary historians like Norbu are constructing cultural continuity in defense of their country's enduring national identity. I do not want to suggest that Tibetan nativists like Norbu are creating this continuity in defiance of the "facts." Rather, they have assembled what they consider to be the relevant historical and cultural materials and used them to state their case, in the process providing intellectual reinforcement for the political process of nation building. My aim here is not to challenge the factual basis of this revisionist history, nor do I intend to dismiss their nativist and nationalist orientation as somehow "misguided." Of course, there are plenty of factual errors, exaggerations, and "invented traditions" in the Bon narrative sources on which they rely, and one is sometimes lead to wonder why these sources are some times cited so imprudently, while Buddhist sources are assessed with such critical discrimination. The point here is that the nativist historians' use of the past has been selective, and the political concerns that inform their selection set them apart from more traditional Tibetan historians.

One of the problems with trying to express the generic features of this alternative historiography lies in representing it as homogenous, as if all "nativist" historians speak in a single voice. This would not only be monotonous, it would level many of the important differences between what each historian emphasizes as valuable about Tibet's past. The historians' perspective on the past, and how they represent it, is informed too by their "positionality" and its constraints. For example, those nationalist historians writing and publishing in contemporary Tibet work within the limits of the official Marxist ideology, while those who write in the Tibetan diaspora communities often feel the censure of a conservative Buddhist audience. The ideological constraints of both locations are restrictive, and there is little tolerance for critical or revisionist historio-graphy. Even Tibetan scholars with research positions at a western university may feel constrained by the norms of "neutrality" or "objectivity," making them reluctant to

express their political passions and engagements in the public arena. Although there are contemporary nationalist scholars within Tibet, such as Chabpel Tseten Phuntsog (Chab spel Tshe brtan Phun tshogs), Nyima Thar, or the late Dhondup Gyal (Don grup Rgyal),[5] whose scholarship on ancient Tibet has a nativist orientation, I will limit my focus to three Tibetan scholars who have written from outside Tibet. Their work has had a far greater impact on western Tibetology due to its accessibility.

My analysis here will focus on three well-known scholars, Gendun Chophel (Dge 'dun Chos 'phel, 1903-1951), Samten Gyaltsen Karmay (Bsam gtan Rgyal mtshan Mkhar rme'u, b.1936) and Namkhai Norbu (Nam mkha'i Nor bu, b.1938), all of whom value Bon as Tibet's indigenous religion, but for different reasons. All three scholars received a traditional monastic education within Tibet, which included formal training in Bon for Karmay. Yet they also studied extensively outside Tibet, where they collaborated with eminent non-Tibetan scholars and historians from whom they learned western historical method, which has informed their challenge of the received Buddhist tradition. Gendun Chophel spent twelve years in India, where he worked closely with Pandit Rahul Sankrityayan, George Roerich, and he collaborated with Jacques Bacot on his translation of the Dunhuang historical manuscripts. Namkhai Norbu was a Professor at the Istituto Orientale at the University of Naples where he collaborated with Giuseppi Tucci, and he is currently the Director of the Shang Shung Institute for the Study of Ancient Tibetan Culture in Italy. He is also an internationally recognized Buddhist lama who specializes in Rdzogs chen teachings and practice. Samten Karmay first studied with David Snellgrove at the School of Oriental and African Studies in London, where he earned his Ph.D. Subsequently he became a Research Fellow at the Toyo Bunko in Japan, then Research Director at the Centre Nationale de la Recherche Scientifique, and is currently a member of the Laboratoire d'Ethnologie et de Sociologie Comparative, University of Paris X. Karmay also recently served as the President of the International Association for Tibetan Studies, the very first Tibetan scholar to do so.

The cosmopolitan training of these scholars did not lessen their Tibetan nationalism. Indeed, it appears that these intellectuals only became fully aware of their Tibetan identity once they left their homeland. Their historical research, which creates new memories of Tibet's glorious past, have on occasion raised considerable controversy inside Tibet and in Tibetan diaspora communities, especially among members of the Buddhist monastic establishment. For example, Gendun Chophel was arrested and imprisoned by the Tibetan government in 1947 for his supposedly seditious political views, and much of his writing, including his historical research on ancient Tibet, was subsequently seized and censored.[6] Likewise, Samten Karmay's revisionist study of the last Tibetan emperor (on *btsan po Glang dar ma*) denied that the ruler was an anti-Buddhist zealot who favored Bon. The Tibetan government-in-exile banned this work for publication because it failed to conform to the traditional Buddhist perspective.[7] Likewise, Norbu's first historical study, which drew upon Bon sources to reconstruct the origins of Tibetan culture and language, was dismissed by conservative Buddhist clergy as nothing but Bon proselytism, a charge that amounted to historical heresy.[8]

These controversies are significant because they highlight in a dramatic fashion an irony for these scholars and their audience. Their most innovative and revisionist historical research, with its nativist themes and its challenge to Buddhist history, may receive a warmer reception from a western academic audience than from a traditional Tibetan readership. Yet their quest to identify Tibet's indigenous culture is motivated to a great extent by the desire to fashion an alternative national consciousness, an agenda directed more at their countrymen than towards western scholars. Their dilemma is to find a responsive Tibetan readership and to avoid the censorship from conservative Buddhist clergy or from the government in exile. Here is how Heather Stoddard expresses the challenge that revisionist historian's face:

> A considerable number of new books written in Tibetan [in exile]...have been censored or banned from publication because they do not conform to

> the desired image of traditional Tibetan society. Any serious discussion of history and of possible shortcomings in the society before 1959 is taboo, thus maintaining the historical consciousness of the Tibetans outside Tibet within an ideological framework that is of course radically different from the Marxist one, but equally rigid. The positive role of critical historiography in the forging of national consciousness is not yet tolerated.[9]

On the other hand, we will see that some western scholars have been drawn towards reconstructing Tibet's autochthonous culture, and they have become a receptive audience for the nativist-style historiography. However, if some western scholars have adopted the nativist concerns, the nationalist agenda has been dropped.

Gendun Chophel

If one were to identify the father of all Tibetan nativist historians writing today, the one to first recognize the importance of history in building a modern nation, the honor would certainly go to Gendun Chophel. Gendun Chophel himself became an ardent Tibetan nationalist only after he left Tibet in 1934, when he went to India with Rahul Sankrityayan, a scholar of Buddhism and an activist in the Indian Independence movement. It was Pandit Sankrityayan who sparked Chophel's interest in nationalism by introducing him to the works of Gandhi and Tagore, Bose and Nehru. While in India he also came into contact with the teachings of the Sinhalese Buddhist reformer and missionary Dharmapāla, the founder of the Mahā Bodhi Society. During Chophel's twelve years of expatriation in India, a period that coincided with the height of the struggle for Indian independence, he came to understand the vital role that history can play in producing a national identity. He believed that Buddhist sectarianism had effectively destroyed Tibetan national unity, and he argued that with the arrival of Padmasambhava, the Tibetans' military ardor was "tamed," resulting in the weakening of Tibet's power in the central Asian arena, and the eventual downfall of the Yarlung empire. He grew increasingly dissatisfied with Buddhist historiography, criticizing the pious legends about the Dharma kings (*chos rgyal*).

He turned to earlier, more reliable sources for reconstructing Tibet's imperial history, including ancient Tibetan epigraphy, Chinese historical sources such as the *Tang shu*, and the Dunhuang manuscripts. In his first article ever published in the *Gsar gyur Melong* (the *News Mirror*), a Tibetan newspaper published in Kalimpong, he wrote on "The Importance of Tibetan History." There he quotes from a variety of Tibetan histories as well as his research on the stone inscriptions dating back to the Yarlung period that he studied in central Tibet. He also seems to allude to the Dunhuang documents, and perhaps to the *Royal Annals* and *Chronicle*, when he criticizes how the Tibetans abandoned "exact detailed chronicles, replaced by legends in which the miraculous dominates so much that historical documents have evaporated like a rainbow."[10] He was the first Tibetan historian to make judicious use of these sources, and his work on the Dunhuang historical texts influenced Jean Bacot's translation of them.

Gendun Chophel's most influential historical work, the *White Annals* (*Deb ther dkar po*), is impressive not only for the breadth of the non-Buddhist historical sources he drew upon. More impressive is its aim: it was his ambition to make his contemporaries aware of their own imperial past, to awaken their nationalism, and to rekindle interest in the military as a means to unify Tibet. The history celebrates the glorious past of the empire, and highlights Tibet's aggressive militarism and territorial expansionism. He pays considerable attention to the ancient customs of the kings and their clothes,[11] describing too their armies and conquests. One particular conquest that he discussed was the Tibetan annexation of the vast Zhang zhung empire (where ancient Bon supposedly flourished) that he dated to Srong btsan sgam po's reign, after carefully consulting the Dunhuang Tibetan Chronicle.[12] As we have seen, most Bon histories place this event a century later, under the reign of evil Khri srong lde btsan, who according to Bon tradition was responsible for the persecution of Bon. This corrected chronology illustrates his critical interrogation of differing sources. Even though he relied upon Bon histories to

reconstruct the Yarlung period, his use of them was prudent, and he seemed aware that the Bonpos' histories manipulated past events to fit their own needs.

Another example in the *White Annals* that illustrates his careful consideration of Bon historical claims occurs in his discussion of the etymology of *Bon* and *Bod* (Tibet). As he notes, Bon histories often state that their own tradition, styled "eternal Bon" (*g.yung drung Bon*), antedated the name for Tibet: the nation was first called "the country of Bon," which was gradually corrupted into "the country of Bod." That Bon histories offer this self-serving etymology for Bod, and claim their own religion to be the "eternal" tradition, does not make it so, he argued. Thus he turned to other sources for corroboration, including Chinese and Mongolian texts, which also referred to the country of Tibet as the country of Phon/Bon. He then notes that in the old orthography found in Dunhuang texts, the affixes '*d*' and '*n*' were frequently interchanged, and he provides some examples, e.g. the title of "emperor" (*btsan po*) was often spelled *btsad po*. Only then does he conclude that the derivation of Bod from Bon seems plausible, thereby supporting the etymological claims made by Bonpos.[13]

Although Gendun Chophel accepted that Bon was the native religion of Tibet, he did not celebrate the role that Bon played in the formation of the Tibetan empire, nor did he regard Bon as the basis of Tibetan civilization, as Namkhai Norbu does. According to some oral sources recorded by Heather Stoddard in *Le mendiant de l'Amdo*, it was his opinion that Bon was much like Buddhism in its otherworldly orientation:

> The *Bon* religion is not shamanistic. It is similar to Buddhism. The only difference between the two was, in the past, the matter of sacrifices. It was the cause of conflict between Lang Darma and the Buddhists of Tibet in the ninth century. Shamanism "belongs to this world" whereas the *Bon* religion, as other religions, "goes beyond the world.[14]

If this accurately reflects his thought, then it may make him the first scholar to dispute the use of this foreign category to describe Bon.

Based on the *White Annals*, we cannot characterize Gendun Chophel as a Bon "nativist," for nowhere does he suggest that Tibet's early military accomplishments and emerging national ethos were inspired by Bon. He does, however, attribute the downfall of the great Tibetan empire to Indian Buddhism, and especially its influence on politics, and not to the Chinese. In a conversation recalled more than thirty years later by his friend and disciple Gyelong, Gendun Chophel is reported to have said the following:

> We must fight to regain all the territory that used to belong to Tibet. For example, consider Tsaidam in the north. The name itself is Tibetan and it means "saline marsh," and Chone, Gyerong and Muli in Yunnan, for all these areas are really Tibetan lands. For more that a thousand years the Dharma has soaked into the soul of the Tibetans, and now what can we do about it? An ironic solution would be to take the Jowo, the symbolic center of all Tibetan Buddhist traditions, and set it up in the center of Tibetan territories between Kham, Amdo and Central Tibet, to unite Tibet with religion. Then we would have to fight to destroy religion. But who destroyed Tibet, and when? India destroyed it at the time of Padmasambhava. China, on the other hand, gave two of her daughters. Chinese influence in Tibet was great during the Yarlung dynasty.... The Jokhang was founded by Wensheng, the Chinese princess. If Padmasambhava had not come to Tibet, the Tibetans would have taken Chang-an. Songsten Gampo doubtless united Yarlung, Pembo and Tsang in the first place. The Tibetans from Amdo originally made up Songtsen Gampo's armies, and they were sent to the border to put down the other people and to protect the new Tibetan State. Thus, this king sent fifty thousand soldiers to Hor Minyag and Arch'ung. Later, King Trisong Detsen went as far as Lanzhou himself to free three thousand prisoners. If the Tibetans do not grasp and understand this fact, that the Tibetans from the border areas are the descendents of the armies sent in all directions by the ancient kings, we will never be able to be united. Trisong Detsen founded a Tibetan republic, a lay state using Buddhist ideas like the *dharmarāja* Aśoka. Now we have united the Dharma and politics in Tibet. That is the problem. If you mix sugar and salt, is that edible?[15]

Chophel's irony is apparent here, when he recommends using the statue of the Buddha found in the Jokhang in Lhasa as a patriotic symbol to unify the Tibetans in defense of their Dharma. Yet after suggesting how a Buddhist symbol might be used to mobilize patriotic sentiment, he then turns to criticize the role that Indian Buddhism played in Tibetan unity, while celebrating the Chinese contributions to Tibet. In his concluding

words we see his prescription that religion and politics ought to be kept separate, since the result of their union is distasteful like "mixing sugar and salt."

While Gendun Chophel's nativism and desire for modern reform of the military reveals little debt to Bon ideology, he did play an important role in establishing a revisionist interpretation of Tibet's past. In particular, his critique of the Buddhism's destructive role in undermining Tibetan nationalism, and his attraction to Tibet's pre-Buddhist history, are values found in the work of Samten Karmay, whose nativism has a more distinctly Bon flavor.

Samten Karmay

In a recent article, Samten Karmay echoes Gendun Chophel when he diagnoses the ill effect that Buddhism has had on nationalism, at least until the last forty years in Tibet. In Karmay's judgment, nationalism requires the mobilization of the will, self-determination, and patriotism in order to develop. However, the traditional Buddhist monastic education in Tibet actively discouraged these qualities, though it reinforced xenophobia and cultural isolationism:

> The concept of national identity in Tibet was, however, much more clearly expressed in ancient times than in, say, the Middle Ages. With the advent of Buddhism and particularly from the eleventh century onwards, the national consciousness of the Tibetan people suffered greatly. This is, of course, not really surprising when we consider the manner in which Buddhism took hold on the minds of the people at large, especially with the prevailing monastic education. Nationalism requires will, self-assertion, self-identification and self-determination, and these notions have no place and receive no respect in Buddhist education as we know it. Tibetan monastic culture had a very strong tendency to discourage any contact with foreign religion and culture. If patriotism is the core of nationalism and if it were ever felt, it is often expressed in terms of protecting Buddhist doctrine and its institutions, and not the country as a nation or a state.[16]

Karmay could be speaking from his own experience here, for after studying the monastic curriculum for many years in Tibet, he subsequently pursued a western education and

research positions in London, Tokyo, and Paris, making him a truly cosmopolitan Tibetan intellectual.

Karmay's critical diagnosis of the ill effect of Buddhist values on Tibetan nationalism was proclaimed in a controversial article titled "Religion: A Major Cause of Tibetan Disunity," published over twenty years ago in the *Tibetan Review.* In it he describes the pernicious effects of institutionalized Buddhism, and its commingling with politics (*chos srid zung 'brel*), resulting in the system of rule "rightly described as theocratic" that he traces back to the Fifth Dalai Lama. He singles out sectarianism and the pursuit of foreign patronage as especially detrimental to a unified state. He argues that Buddhist sectarianism is not only divisive, but it also locates the source of religious authority in lineages that are traced back to Indian masters. The Indocentric orientation of Buddhism denigrates any creativity to Tibetan thought and artistic expression:

> Any original ideas put forward were first mocked and eventually suppressed as having no Indic basis, for example the doctrines of the Jonangpa. In the field of art Tibetans never escaped from religion and the majority were faithful copiers at best, and what literature can we read that has no smell of religion?[17]

Karmay's criticism of the Tibetans' rote imitation of Indian ideas and static forms seems to echo the evaluation of many western scholars, who were repelled by the repetitive ritualism and arid scholasticism that they found so characteristic of Tibetan monastic life. One wonders how much Karmay's critique of Buddhism, and especially its Indocentrism, is informed by western aesthetic ideals, including the romantic glorification of the creative genius.

There is much in Karmay's writing that reveal his own training in and commitment to a modern western secular society. At the conclusion of his article that critiques Buddhism as a cause of Tibetan disunity, he advances the argument that the union of religion and politics hinders Tibetan society. "Religion," he argues, "should play only a private role for individuals and be deprived of any role whatsoever in national

life." His final words express the value of developing a critical historical consciousness rather than relying on religious superstition. He concludes with this appeal to his Tibetan readers: "This article is to remind us Tibetans to open our eyes and take note of history. History repeats itself and it should be taken as a guide for the future. Let us read history rather than rely upon the sporadic babbling of the superstitious and obsolete Nechung oracle." Karmay here privileges critical historians (like himself) as more reliable prophets than religious visionaries or the Nechung oracle. His call for the secularizing of Tibetan politics and the privatization of religion proved controversial in the Tibetan exile community, where some Buddhist monks labeled Karmay himself as a dangerous source of disunity among the Buddhist faithful. [18]

While Karmay's scholarly publications are guarded about expressing any nationalistic sentiments, they do betray his interest in locating the religious substratum that grounds Tibetan identity. His recent work has focused on identifying Tibet's indigenous religious forms. These autochthonous elements are not unique to the Bon tradition, for many of them were adopted and adapted by Buddhists, and they can still be recognized today in popular lay practices. Yet he has found Bon texts of great value for locating the first manifestations of these indigenous elements, and he is interested in understanding their original form, before they were transformed to serve Buddhist purposes. He has studied the earliest cosmogonies and theogonies, the narratives about the origins of the Tibetan people and their first king, the myths about Tibet's sacred mountains, all of which were connected to the cult of divine kingship.[19] Likewise, he has investigated the incense fumigation rituals (*bsang*) associated with this royal cult, as well as the rituals for "ransoming" (*glud*) the soul (*bla*), or placing it in a turquoise stone (*g.yu*) for protection, and the age-old practice of flying prayer flags (*rlung rta*), all of which were associated with the Bon cult of divine kingship.[20] He has steadfastly maintained that there is considerable continuity between this archaic cult of sacred kingship and the fully organized Bon religion that emerged in the eleventh century. His

position is at odds with many western scholars, who have argued that the royal cult and the post-eleventh century Bon tradition, organized along Buddhist doctrinal and institutional lines, are entirely disconnected traditions.[21]

But Karmay's interest in these venerable religious forms is not motivated by antiquarian curiosity, nor is his interpretation of their meaning and value strictly historicist. He has made a number of research trips into Tibet as an ethnographer, where he has observed many of these archaic rituals still being practiced today. Karmay suggests that practices like flying prayer flags and the cult of sacred mountains serve an important social function by binding the participants into a community. Often in Tibet today, that communal feeling has strong nationalistic overtones, as the participants in the mountain cult become aware of "their" sacred territory, and the prayer flags become emblems of their Tibetan-ness. Karmay's interpretation of these contemporary folk practices may be convincing as a form of sociological analysis. But in underscoring the ancient origins of these practices to the participants and to his readers, he is also creating new popular memories for them, authorizing them as authentically Tibetan, even if he describes them as "secular" beliefs.[22] It is as if Karmay intends to use his tools as a historian and ethnographer to dig deep into the religious substratum of Tibetan folk identity, and identify its earliest strata in the imperial past.

But how is Karmay's quest to identify the origins of these popular practices a form of "Bon nativism?" To answer this we must turn to a paper Karmay delivered at the International Association of Tibetan Studies in Norway, in which he provides the context for interpreting and integrating his recent work.[23] In the paper he returns to a favorite topic of his, the earliest etiological myth about Tibet's first king, which describes how the king descended to earth from heaven, where his divine ancestors resided. Karmay argues that this origin myth about the king's descent to the land of Tibet served as the matrix for many autochthonous beliefs and practices, and it was the "archetype" (*dpe*) for all cosmogonies and theogonies. He also notes that the king's divine nature sanctioned his

royal power, and the myths invoked and the rituals practiced by the priests served to promote this imperial figure as the guardian of the cosmic and social order. Many of the rituals performed by the priests involve the recitation of narratives (*smrang*) about the divine origins of various ritual implements. The rituals involve the reenactment of theogonies, which are themselves modeled on the divine king's primal descent from heaven.

With these origin myths serving as the script for ritual practices, and the rituals serving to bind together the participants into a community under the protection of the divine king, Karmay concludes that we have all of the ingredients needed for a coherent religion, a religion that certain Dunhuang texts refer to as *Bon*, and to its priest practitioners as *bonpo*.[24] All of Karmay's previous research on indigenous religious elements—the origin myths of the Tibetan race, the soul (*bla*) rituals, prayer flag practices, and so forth—are incorporated here as the specific ingredients of this ancient Bon religion. Bon thus becomes the fertile ground of Tibet's native culture, rooted in the notion of a royal ruler of divine ancestry, which flowered into the cultural and imperial achievements of the Yarlung dynasty. This image is a powerful one, especially when we remember that many of these rituals and myths are still found in contemporary Tibet, although they are no longer connected to the memory of Tibet's royal primogenitor. Nonetheless, I would suggest that one of Karmay's purposes as a historian is to remind us (and more especially Tibetans) that the rituals still practiced today—such as incense purification, or mountain cults—reenact those ancient rites that were inextricably intertwined with Tibetan origins. Karmay's story of the past becomes a substitute for the origin narrative (*smrang*) recited in those ancient rituals, for these narrative recitations have long been lost or discontinued in the ritual performances of today.

That contemporary Tibetans are unaware of the archaic Bon origins of some of their popular rituals is not due to cultural amnesia alone, claims Karmay. Buddhists played a key role in destroying the structure of the indigenous belief system when they transformed the origin myth of the divine king's descent from heaven. The Buddhists

turned Tibet's first king into a cakravartin-like figure who came from India. Some Buddhist versions of the myth even claim that Tibet's first king was a member of the Śākya clan, making him a distant relative of the Buddha. Once Buddhists had replaced the original Bon version of the myth with a royal immigrant from India, the native beliefs and practices lost the archetype that they had been repeating, and the Buddhists succeeded in banishing the Bon myths to the marginal realm of popular "superstition" (*rnam rtog*).[25]

Karmay is certainly not the first Tibetan to criticize the role that Buddhist historiography has played in erasing Tibetan's native identity. In fact, Karmay has written that Namkhai Norbu was the first Tibetan to question the value of his own Buddhist historiography. While Gendun Chophel would qualify as an even earlier critic, let us turn to Namkhai Norbu, whom Karmay praised for helping his countrymen understand their own identity by returning to the origins of Tibetan culture.

Namkhai Norbu

Karmay's laudatory comments appear in his introduction to a cultural history written by Namkhai Norbu, the text of which Norbu originally presented as a lecture to young Tibetans in exile, entitled *Bod rigs gzhon nu rnams la gros su 'debs pa gzi yi phreng ba*, "The Necklace of Gzi: Counsel to Tibetan Youth."[26] The message of Norbu's speech to the younger generation of Tibetans is unabashedly nationalist and nativist. He argues that the uniqueness of Tibetan culture extends back thousands of years during the period when Bon flourished, making Tibetan civilization as venerable and legitimate as that of China. He exhorts his young audience to study their Bon heritage as far back as the Zhang zhung period, for it will give them an appreciation for their country's highly evolved culture, prior to the arrival of Buddhism.

One of the dominant themes voiced in Norbu's lecture is his critical dissent against Buddhist historiography. He debunks the legend that Tibet's first king descended from the Śākya clan, as well as the Buddhist myth that the first Tibetan people were the offspring of the mixed union of a monkey and a rock ogress, incarnations of Avalokiteśvara and Tārā respectively. While there are a few contemporary Buddhist modernists (e.g. the Dalai Lama), who have suggested that the story of the Tibetans' monkey ancestor, when demythologized, anticipates Darwin's theory of evolution, Namkhai Norbu ridicules the negative image it promotes of pre-Buddhist Tibet as an empty wasteland, entirely bereft of civilization and human beings until these Buddhist saviors compassionately conjoined to create the first Tibetans.[27] He complains that the Tibetans' excessive devotion to the Dharma and its place of origin has resulted in their over-valuation of Indian culture, and consequently they regard their own as intrinsically inferior.

To illustrate the Tibetans' cultural inferiority complex, he cites the claim that Tibetan writing was modeled on an Indian script and invented solely for the purpose of translating Indian Buddhist texts. Another example he offers is the decision by Buddhists to canonize only those texts with an Indian pedigree, depriving autochthonous Tibetan literature of any value.[28] Norbu's theory of the origins of the Tibetan script serves as a point of departure from traditional Buddhist historians. Recognizing the value of linking Tibetan language, national identity, and an independent history, Norbu argues that the source of Tibetan writing lies in a Zhang zhung script. He then adds that Zhang zhung, with its widespread Bon religion, served as the cradle of Tibetan civilization, not the Yarlung valley as commonly supposed. Furthermore, he claims that this Zhang zhung civilization stretches back more than three thousand years, according to the Bon histories that he consults.[29] With these extravagant assertions about Zhang zhung and its Bon-based culture, Norbu ventures into an area with few reliable historical witnesses, other than Bon texts dating from the fourteenth century or later. These texts, which present the

advanced Bon civilization of Zhang zhung in hyperbolic terms, glorify this great land just as Buddhist histories do for India. Despite being so critical of the Indocentric bias found in Buddhist texts, Norbu accepts the exaggerated claims of these Bon texts at face value, as if they preserved perfect memories of events that occurred millennia earlier.

This is not to say that the region of Zhang zhung is a figment of the Bon imagination. The Dunhuang texts place it roughly in western Tibet at the time of its annexation into Tibet by Srong btsan sgam po. For Norbu though, Zhang zhung was actually the original name for the region later identified as Tibet (*Bod*), so it was not a "foreign" empire. Norbu's argument then shifts to etymologies, and he cites the research of Gendun Chophel on the meaning of *Bon/Bod* as entirely reasonable, for it would also explain how Zhang zhung, the country of Bon, could then become known as Tibet.[30]

The manipulation of etymologies is a strategy commonly used in Bon texts, and Norbu's own history of Tibet and Zhang zhung relies upon this time-honored technique. He provides alternative etymologies for archaic Tibetan terms in the language of Zhang zhung, and many of his explanations for the root meaning of concrete terms have an abstract philosophical quality, signaling his own commitment to Rdzogs chen. For example, he explains that the archaic Tibetan term *khri* ("throne") originally connoted "mind" (*sems*) in the Zhang zhung language; the word for prayer flag (*rlung rta*, literally "wind horse") originally was spelled *klung/klong rta*, and signified "universal foundation" or "omnipervasiveness."[31] It seems that the deeper Norbu delves into the etymologies of Tibetan and Zhang zhung terms, the earlier he goes into the collective memory of Tibetans, the closer he comes to encountering the mind in its essential purity.

The origins of Tibetan history for Norbu may ultimately dissolve into the Dharmadhātu. But on a more mundane level, Norbu needs to demonstrate how the timeless wisdom of Bon is essentially Tibetan. In the introduction to his most recent study of Bon, *Sgrung, lde 'u bon gsum gyi gtam e ma ho*, he describes with some urgency the perils facing Tibetans today, who are threatened with cultural assimilation by the vast

number of Chinese present in Tibet. The only way to save Tibetan identity, he argues, is to preserve the essential aspects of Tibetan culture, those cultural elements with genuine roots reaching back to the civilization of Zhang zhung and Bon. Whereas in his earlier lecture to Tibetan youths Norbu had made Buddhism into the foreign "other" in order to construct a genuine Tibetan selfhood, here we see how China too becomes Tibet's dangerous "other," threatening to swallow up Tibetan identity.

In defense of Tibetan cultural autonomy, Norbu puts forward an unconventional argument for the ancient Bon "sciences" of medicine, astrology, and divination. While many Tibetan historians have acknowledged that these traditional sciences originated in China, Norbu suggests instead that their true source lie in Zhang zhung, where they were developed by Bon sages and subsequently spread to China. In support of this hypothesis, Norbu relates the story recorded in many Bon histories that a disciple of Gshen rab taught astrology and divination to the old Chinese sage Kong rtse (Confucius), who then disseminated these practices all throughout China.[32] While Norbu seems somewhat reluctant to treat this story as grounded in historical fact (elsewhere he fixes Gshen rab's date of birth to 1917 BCE),[33] he does find it probable that Gshen rab's distant descendents in Zhang zhung could have spread the ancient Bon astrological traditions to China. However improbable we might find this idea, it is important for Norbu because it demonstrates that China was actually indebted to Zhang zhung culture in the past. This of course reverses the contemporary imbalance of power between China and Tibet.

Norbu's positive evaluation of ancient Tibet and Zhang zhung is based upon an uncritical acceptance of the idealized images found in late Bon historical texts, and he has become their outspoken advocate. If we contrast his historical method with that used by Karmay, Norbu's nativism may appear naive, while Karmay's critical style of argumentation is informed by the rigorous standards of western historiography. While Karmay's work has been written in dialogue with Tibetologists, Norbu's research on Bon, combining his academic and spiritual concerns, has been most influential upon his

students and disciples in Italy. In order to understand the impact of their research on western students of early Tibetan history and Bon, I will briefly review some of the reactions by western scholars to their Bon nativism.

Bon Nativism in Western Scholarship

Adriano Clemente, an Italian student of Namkhai Norbu, has enabled his work to reach a broad audience outside of his Shang Shung Institute in Italy by translating his work on Rdzogs chen and Bon into Italian and English.[34] In the preface to Norbu's study of Bon that he translated, he expresses what is valuable about this research on Tibet's native worldview to a modern western reader. For him, the ancient tradition of Bon that Norbu reconstructs contains primordial wisdom about how to sustain a harmonious and sacred relationship with the natural world. The Bon practices of astrology, divination, and medicine were all concerned with restoring cosmic and individual harmony when various spiritual energies got out of balance. Clemente believes that the knowledge found in Bon texts is a particular expression of an ancient global form of spirituality that has much to offer to us alienated moderns, reminding us of our natural interconnections with each other and the earth:

> In our era we have witnessed the disappearance of values and traditions based on civilizations thousands of years old, and nowadays man seems to have forgotten that part of himself which formed the essential nucleus of the myths and rites of ancient peoples. For this reason the danger of extinction of a culture tied to ancient traditions, as the Tibetan tradition is, means the loss of a knowledge that belongs to all of humanity, as it is part of that original wisdom or global vision that we find in various forms in all the religious cultures of the world.[35]

Clemente's attraction to Bon is reminiscent of the nostalgia for archaic worldviews that we found in Eliade, whom he quotes approvingly on why the study of primordial traditions is important to us today.[36] Clemente's interpretation of Norbu's work, though sympathetic, does violate the nativist dimension of Norbu's appeal for Bon. The tradition

loses its uniqueness as the genealogical basis for the collective identity of Tibetans. Norbu's belief in the indigenous (and intrinsic) value of Bon for Tibetans becomes universalized in Clemente's translation for western readers, as the Bon tradition becomes part of our general heritage as human beings.

There are other non-Tibetan scholars, less interested in appropriating Bon for spiritual reasons, who have accepted the historical value of Bon in producing the accomplishments of the Yarlung empire. Erik Haarh, who studied the contributions made by the Yarlung royal myths to ancient Tibetan history, argued that the military and cultural achievements of the imperial era were the product of a native culture grounded in the ideology of sacred kingship, which the Bon tradition did so much to support. As the state religion, the Bon tradition provided not only the religious basis for the king's sacred status, with its myths of divine origin, oaths of fealty, and other royalist rituals, but Bon was the real foundation of the empire. Haarh believed that Tibetan sources dating from before the Buddhist conquest, such as the royal inscriptions, offer us conclusive proof that the imperial accomplishments were attributed to the king's divine status. Haarh also echoed the Tibetan nativists when he insisted that the ascendancy of Buddhism in Tibet spelled the disintegration of the Yarlung empire—not so much because Buddhist ideals of non-violence pacified the Tibetan mentality, but because Buddhism destroyed the indigenous Bon traditions, the very basis for spiritual life and imperial culture.

> When, at last, Buddhism got a foothold in Tibet, its influence, however, became the very reason for the fall of the Dynasty and the disintegration of the Yarlung Empire. This was not the result of a general mollification or pacification of the Tibetan mentality, but because Buddhism became a destructive agent to the spiritual life and tradition of the Tibetan people. To the Tibetan kings, adhering to Buddhism for the purpose of making their authority independent on the ancient national traditions, which at the same time meant its very basis and its restriction, Buddhism became disastrous, ruining the Dynasty in its own defeat against the last display of strength of the aboriginal traditions.[37]

In particular, Buddhists managed to weaken the Tibetans' indigenous form of royal ancestor worship by substituting an Indian figure for the divinely descended primogenitors of the dynasty. Here Haarh foretold the very point that Karmay has made only recently. Haarh perhaps went even further than Karmay when he stated that Buddhism also weakened the Tibetan's dependence on their family, clans, and ancestors, by undermining the authority of local, paternal, and clan deities.[38]

After Haarh published his work on the Yarlung Dynasty in 1969, the next person to pursue an in-depth study of the religion of the imperial period was a French scholar, Ariane Macdonald, who in 1971 wrote a book-length article with the uninviting title of "Un lecture des Pelliot tibétains 1286, 1287, 1038, 1044 et 1290."[39] Macdonald belongs to the "French school" of Tibetology, which has a formidable lineage of scholars who have studied ancient Tibet, with interests in the Dunhuang manuscripts in particular. This lineage would include Paul Pelliot, Jean Bacot, Marcelle Lalou, Rolf Stein, Anne-Marie Blondeau, Anne Chayet, as well as Macdonald herself. Their painstaking philological work on the archaic language used in the Dunhuang texts is characteristically quite cautious. But if I were to venture an uncautious generalization about what motivates their study of ancient Tibet, it would be that these scholars have been concerned with recovering the native Tibetans' authentic voice, a voice which Buddhists have managed to stifle quite successfully. Macdonald's work exemplifies this coordination of philology with the rather romantic purpose of reconstructing the vanquished native worldview. In her study of the Dunhuang texts listed above, she advanced the novel thesis that the indigenous traditions centering on the sacred sovereign were not really part of Bon, but a tradition she identified as *gtsug*. This religion of *gtsug* was consciously organized during the reign of Srong btsan sgam po, and it featured a religious system of royal governance, with a cosmology and a detailed vision of the afterlife. That neither Tibetans nor her Tibetologist colleagues had ever heard of *gtsug* as Tibet's earliest religion was only evidence for the suppression of its native voice by later Buddhist and Bonpo historians.

Macdonald's research on *gtsug* displaced Bon as the autochthonous religion of Tibet. Even though some of the priests who performed the royal mortuary rituals were identified as *bonpo* in these Dunhuang sources, she stated that there is very little continuity between the cosmology, eschatology, and traditions of sacred sovereignty in *gtsugs* and the institutionalized Bon religion that emerged in the eleventh century. Macdonald's rejection of Bon as Tibet's native tradition was championed by her colleague Anne-Marie Blondeau.[40] Both disputed the pretended antiquity of the Bon tradition, arguing for a hiatus between the *bonpo* priests involved in *gtsug* and the Bonpos who practice a form of unorthodox Buddhism. Their research undermines the Bon nativism of Karmay and especially Norbu, and their position on the late emergence of Bon has been supported by the work of other leading Bon scholars. David Snellgrove, Per Kvaerne, and Dan Martin all concur that the quest for "pure" Bon, as the native religion entirely distinct from Buddhism, is mistaken. If one insists upon looking for the cultural origins of Bon, they suggest that one look for it as an alternative transmission of Buddhism originating in central Asia.

Although Macdonald's research lead to the prevailing view today among Tibet-ologists that Bon was not a constituted religion during the Yarlung dynasty (contra Karmay), much less a venerable tradition extending back thousands of years (as Norbu would have it), Macdonald's interpretation of *gtsug* has not been uncontested. The name and form of Tibet's native religion continues to be debated. In a series of articles entitled "Tibetica Antiqua," Rolf Stein rejected Macdonald's interpretation of *gtsug* as the name for the indigenous tradition of sacred kingship. He offers sound philological arguments that the term referred not to a distinct religion, but to characteristics like "morality", "good conduct," or "correct customs," qualities that appear to be invoked in the pre-Buddhist tradition and in early Buddhism alike. Indeed, Stein argues that the boundaries between the pre-Buddhist tradition(s) and early Buddhism in Tibet were quite permeable and elastic, without any distinct dividing line for distinguishing the two as antagonistic.[41]

Stein's research on pre-Buddhist religious ideas and practices takes issue with much of his colleagues' scholarship (including Karmay's), because he believes that they have too readily systematized the indigenous elements into a circumscribed tradition. Once this tradition has been identified, either as Bon or *gtsug*, it inevitably must compete with the newly arriving Buddhist tradition, only to lose out through assimilation or suppression by its better-organized opponent. For Stein though, the indigenous traditions associated with divine kingship cannot be adequately described as Bon or *gtsug*. In fact, these unsystematic traditions really have no name, so he refers to them under the general rubric of the "nameless tradition," an appropriately vague term for describing a shapeless jumble of native elements. What Stein may accomplish by using this amorphous category is to make it more difficult for scholars to essentialize the native elements into a concrete tradition. This has consequences too for the Tibetan nativists in search of their origins. It is difficult to derive Tibetan-ness from unidentified, nameless stuff.

The project of recovering the Tibetans' indigenous voice, a voice that Buddhists have successfully managed to stifle, has a strong appeal. The scholarship of Karmay and Norbu requires that we reconsider the value of Bon texts, and recognize and overcome the regnant Buddhist biases that dismiss them as derivative and marginal. Their work challenges us to take seriously the alternative vision of Tibet's early history found in Bon texts, without necessarily accepting that alternative vision as authentic and true. A few dimensions of the nativists' revisionist agenda require some critical comment. Many of Karmay's criticisms of Buddhism echo the familiar stereotypes found in western misconceptions about Buddhism. For example, the claim that Buddhism is a "pacifist" religion that "tamed" the Tibetans calls to mind the popular western fantasy of Tibet as Shangri-la. Karmay's polemic betrays his indebtedness to western evaluations of Buddhism. Likewise, his urgent need to identify what is truly native in Tibetan Bon is occasioned by the Chinese colonial presence in Tibet today. In this sense Karmay's "nativism" is actually a hybrid construction of Tibetan and non-Tibetan ideas.

What seems especially problematic is when western scholars accept the claim that Bon serves as the religious foundation of Tibetan identity. Origins have long exerted a seductive pull on the Tibetan and western imagination, for they are authoritative as a pure presence, around which Tibetan identity can crystallize in the mute pre-historical past. The quest for authentic origins serves the political agendas of contemporary Tibetans. Karmay and Norbu's project really reverses the traditional Buddhist evaluation of Bon from the derivative other into an authentic self; but Bon is nonetheless still constituted in relation to that Buddhist other. From the "outsider's" perspective, Bon can never achieve the autonomy that is claimed for it, for it is too dependent upon Buddhism for its identity. Reflexivity binds the two together: without the other, there is no language for the self.

In this chapter we have seen how the recent growth of interest in the Bon tradition (among both Tibetans and westerners) is connected to a surging nationalist movement. Some of the leading Bon scholars value this alternative tradition as a repository of native Tibetan values. We have reviewed the nativist ideology undergirding the writing of Samten Karmay and especially Namkhai Norbu, who argues that the uniqueness of Tibetan culture extends back thousands of years during the period when Bon flourished. This makes Tibetan civilization as venerable, independent, and legitimate as Chinese civilization, if not more so. Norbu's positive evaluation of ancient Tibetan culture is based upon an uncritical acceptance of the idealized images found in Bon "historical" texts, and he has become their contemporary advocate, despite his own Buddhist training.

Many western students of Bon, who are not Bonpos themselves, seem taken in by this nativist revision of Tibet's early history. The quest to recover their silenced voice re-enacts a form of reverse ethnocentrism that salvages the Bonpos' real history. A few western scholars make it their mission to recuperate the much maligned perspective of the Bonpos. One might detect a slightly patronizing attitude here. It is assumed that contemporary Tibetan culture is so fragile that a western "outsider" needs to rescue Bon, making the salvager the redeemer of Tibet's authentic culture. Yet any critique of the

moral authority presumed by western scholars, who engage in such a salvaging project, overlooks the fact that they are collaborating with Tibetan Bonpo scholars today, whose mission is simply to keep their "tradition" alive and make their history heard. Perhaps the most important epistemological problem with either nativist project is that it simply reverses the Bonpos as derivative Other (in Buddhist narratives) into authentic Self. This new (or ancient) essence only becomes constituted in terms of the Buddhist other, and hence can never achieve the autonomous self-same identity that it claims. Likewise, the urgent quest to recuperate a Tibetan nationalist essence (whether Bonpo or Buddhist) arises at times when Tibet is threatened with domination by Chinese colonizers. The image of the "insider" that is to be recovered in all of its former plentitude remains an "insider" only in dependence of their colonizer's own self-image. The nativist is still subject to the binary structure imposed by the "outsider."[42]

The construction of identity and the invention of an enduring indigenous tradition are not simply intellectual exercises, but a complex historical and political process that takes place as an urgent social contest. For the nativist historian, both Buddhism and the Chinese colonizer threaten to swallow up Tibetan identity, so they are deemed the foreign "other" in order to find a genuine selfhood grounded in native soil. Some of the issues that divide the non-Tibetan scholars are based upon how they identify and characterize the fundamental elements of Tibet's indigenous religion, what unifies these elements into a coherent religion. what its name is, and how long it endures in Tibet. These are fundamental issues for how we "imagine religion," but this is not simply an arcane academic topic for Tibetologists. How Tibet's native religion is imagined affects (and may be an effect of) Tibetan identity politics today. Any representation of Tibet's ancient past becomes consequential to those Tibetans today who are so interested in salvaging what is really unique about their culture and traditions. It is important for non-native scholars of Tibetan religion to become sensitive to the political consequences of their own representations.

Notes to Chapter III

[1] See *Buddhism in Contemporary Tibet: Religious Revival and Cultural Identity*, ed. by Melvyn C. Goldstein and Matthew T. Kapstein (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998); Ronald D. Schwartz, *Circle of Protest: Political Ritual in the Tibetan Uprising* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994); Heather Stoddard, "Tibetan Publications and National Identity," in *Resistance and Reform in Tibet*, ed. by Robert Barnett and Shirin Akiner (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), pp. 121-156.

[2] Frank J. Korom, ed. *Constructing Tibetan Culture: Contemporary Perspectives* (Quebec: World Heritage Press, 1997); Frank J. Korom, ed. *Tibetan Culture in the Diaspora* (Vienna: Austrian Academy of Science, 1998); Margaret Nowack, *Tibetan Refugees: Youth and the New Generation of Meaning* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1984); Girija Saklani, *The Uprooted Tibetans in India: A Sociological Study of Continuity and Change* (New Delhi: Cosmo Publications, 1984).

[3] Namkhai Norbu, "Tibetan Culture" in *Tibet Journal* 3.3 (Autumn 1978), p. 38.

[4] Namkhai Norbu, *Drung, Deu and Bön: Narrations, Symbolic Languages and the Bön tradition in ancient Tibet*, trans. by Adriano Clemente and Andrew Lukianowicz (Dharamsala: Library of Tibetan Works and Archives, 1995), pp. xviii-xix.

[5] Chap spel Tshe brtan phun tshogs, ed. *Sngon gyi gtam me tog phreng ba, Bod kyi lo rgyus deb ther khag lnga* (Lhasa: Bod ljongs bod yig dpe rnying dpe skrun khang, 1990); also see his "gNya' khri btsan po ni Bod rang gi mi zhig yin," *Bod rig pa'i ched rtsom gces bsdus* (Lhasa: Bod ljongs mi mang dpe skrun khang, 1987), pp. 1-35; Nyima Thar, "On the Origins of the Tibetan Nationality," *Tibet Studies* (Lhasa) 2 (1989), pp. 193-201; and Dhondup Gyal, *Torrents of Youth and Selected Writings* (*Lang tso'i rbab chu dang ljags rtsom bdams sgrig*) ed. by Pema Bhum (Dharamsala: Amnye Machen Institute, 1993); also Pema Bhum, "The Life of Dhondup Gyal: A Shooting Star that Cleaved the Night Sky and Vanished," in *Lungta* No. 9 (Dharamsala: Amnye Machen Institute, Winter 1995), pp. 17-29.

[6] The best critical appraisal of Gendun Chophel remains Heather Stoddard's *Le mendiant de l'Amdo* (Paris: Société d'Ethnographie, 1985); Chapter VIII focuses on the reasons for Gendun Chophel's arrest in Lhasa. Also see her article "dGe-'dun Chos-'phel: The Two Latest Versions of His Life Story," *Tibet Journal* 10.1 (1985), pp. 44-48; and "Tibetan Publications and National Identity" in *Resistance and Reform in Tibet*, p. 129.

[7] Samten Karmay, *Btsan po lha sras dar ma dang de'i rjes su byung ba'i rgyal rabs mdor bsdus* (Dharamsala: Library of Tibetan Works and Archives, 1986). This study, based upon sources contemporary with Glang dar ma found in Dunhuang manuscripts, was originally sponsored by the Library of Tibetan Works and Archives. However, it was subsequently censored by the Tibetan Kashag (*bka' shag*) in Dharamsala because it challenged the image of Glang dar ma found in Buddhist historical sources. Ironically,

Karmay's study of Glang dar ma was published in Beijing and was well-received by Tibetologists there. Today there is a growing number of younger Tibetans who view Glang dar ma as a powerful secular and patriotic king who was devoted to making Tibet into a great country, and Karmay's work is eagerly read by this younger generation.

[8] Namkhai Norbu's first historical work, *Bod kyi lo rgyus las 'phros pa'i gtan g.yung drung nor bu'i do shal* (Dharamsala, 1981), quoted liberally from a number of Bon historical sources, especially on the origins of Tibetan culture and language. Norbu recalled the reception of his historical study in a lecture on "The Origin of Tibetan Language and Culture" which he delivered at the Tibetan Institute of Performing Arts in Dharamsala, on November 1, 1997. "After I had written the book I was reluctant to send it to a publisher because I heard some criticism from some of the people who had read the book; the monasteries and so on who were accusing me of making propaganda for the Bonpos. Although I had written it, I withheld its publication thinking that it would be the source of a great deal of criticism for me. Then I thought that actually that is not the way to do it because if I don't put forward my view on the origin of Tibetan culture nobody will, and we Tibetans will be damaged by this." See *The Mirror: Newspaper of the International Dzogchen Community* (January/February 1998), p. 6.

[9] Heather Stoddard, "Tibetan Publications and National Identity," p. 154. Stoddard's claim that any critical assessment of Tibetan society before 1959 is "taboo" seems a bit overstated. Political essayists and intellectuals like Dawa Norbu, K. Dhondup, Tsering Wangyal, Jamyang Norbu, and Lhasang Tsering (to name just a few) have boldly voiced their criticisms in essays published in the *Tibetan Review* or in the Tibetan exile newspaper *Dmangs gtso*. A recent work of critical historiography that will surely test the exile government's receptiveness to this "taboo" topic is Tsering Shakya's excellent history of modern Tibet, *The Dragon in the Land of Snows* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999).

[10] Gendun Chophel, *Melong* ed. by Tharchin (11 November 1938). Cited in Stoddard, *Le mendiant de l'Amdo*, p. 205.

[11] Dge 'dun Chos 'phel *Bod chen po'i srid lugs dang 'brel ba'i rgyal rabs deb ther dkar po* in *Dge 'dun chos 'phel gyi gsung rtsom,* ed. by Chab spel Tshe brtan phun tshogs. Gangs can rig mdzod vol. 10 (Lhasa: Bod ljongs bod yig dpe rnying dpe skrun khang, 1990), pp. 220-224. For an unsatisfactory English translation by Samten Norboo, see *The White Annals* (Dharamsala: Library of Tibetan Works and Archives, 1978), pp. 29-31. Heather Stoddard also records a conversation that Gendun Chophel had with his friend and disciple Gyelong:

> When Gendun Chomphel talked about the ancient kings, he would wonder "How did they present themselves? How did they live?....Our clothing nowadays, such as the felt hat with a fur border, Tibetan boots and the *chuba* lined with sheepskin, are native, but all the official clothing is imported from China. Also the hat and coat worn by the Sikkimese officials are Manchu in origin. At the time of Songsten Gampo, the Tibetan soldiers wore, according to their rank, a *chuba* with

> a tiger skin or leopard skin border and so on, down to a fox skin for a simple soldier. Do you think it's true Gaylong?" he asked me, before going on, "It's quite possible, because when you gallop on horseback through the Changthang with a fox fur hat on your head, don't you feel your heart glowing with bravery? According to the *Tangshu* our ancestors, the Xifan, wore hats decorated with feathers and horns, and when they set off at a gallop, they'd cry out "*Kihaha!*" just as we do today!"

Cited by Heather Stoddard, *Le mendiant de l'Amdo,* p. 258. Gendun Chophel's fascination with the martial clothes and royal costumes, and his description of their tiger and leopard skin *chubas*, resembles the images found in Bon texts of the robes and symbols granted by the Tibetan kings to their Bon priests in reward of their role in defeating the enemies. See Chapter II note 64.

[12] Dge 'dun Chos 'phel, *Deb ther dkar po*, p. 263. Also see Samten Karmay's assessment of Gendun Chosphel's contribution in "A General Introduction to the History and Doctrines of Bon," *Mémoires of the Research Department of the Tôyô Bunko*, 33 (Tokyo: Toyo Bunko, 1975), pp. 180-181.

[13] Gendun Chophel's etymology of Bon/Bod is often cited by scholars, both western and Tibetan, in support of the claim advanced by Bonpos that their religion is Tibet's autochthonous tradition. While Gendun Chophel does betray an interest in the etymologies of place names as a historian and linguist, he can also express his own skepticism about the folk etymologies created by Tibetans. For example, in his article on "How Countries Got Their Names," he notes the tremendous confusion over the origins of place names arises because "when sound reverberates people think they hear sand raining." Dge 'dun Chos 'phel, *Yul gyi ming btags tshul* in *Dge 'dun chos 'phel gyi gsung rtsom*, ed. by Chab spel Tshe brtan phun tshogs. Gangs can rig mdzod vol. 10 (Lhasa: Bod ljongs bod yig dpe rnying dpe skrun khang, 1990), p. 62.8-9.

[14] Heather Stoddard cites this quote as one of Gendun Chophel's opinions on religious issues, according to unnamed oral sources. *Le mendiant de l'Amdo*, Chapter IX. It is important to identify what Tibetan term is translated by Stoddard as "shamanistic" and "shamanism."

[15] Cited by Heather Stoddard, *Le mendiant de l'Amdo,* p. 258.

[16] Samten Karmay, "Mountain Cults and National Identity in Tibet," in *Resistance and Reform in Tibet*, ed. by Robert Barnett and Shirin Akiner (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), p. 113. Elsewhere, Karmay writes that the Tibetan empire declined because of the pacifist values introduced by Buddhism: "At the peak of the Tibetan Empire in the eighth century AD, Buddhism became the state religion and made a great contribution towards enriching the native culture with Indic conceptions, but at the same time it had another effect on the country: the decline of the Tibetan Empire due to Buddhist pacifism." From Karmay's "The Exiled Government and the Bonpo Community in India," *Lungta* No. 7 (Geneva, 1993), p. 21.

[17] Samten G. Karmay, "Religion: A Major Cause of Tibetan Disunity," *Tibetan Review* Vol. 12.5 (May 1977), p. 25.

[18] Karmay, "Religion: A Major Cause of Tibetan Disunity," p. 26. Karmay's strongly worded article elicited two very different responses in subsequent letters to the editor published in the *Tibetan Review*. Karmay's critique was welcomed and even underscored by K. Dhondup, a leading Tibetan intellectual and historian. Dhondup agreed with Karmay that Buddhist sectarianism "emaciated and crippled the Tibetan state" in the past, and it continues to do so in exile. Like Karmay, Dhondup criticizes the blend of religion and politics and he advocates a "secular democracy." He ends his letter with a reference to the tragic deaths of Lungshar and Gendun Chophel as a warning of how regressive Tibetan society will become if "we mock and mutilate every new idea which is a bit unpleasant or unconventional." Dhondup's prophetic comments are juxtaposed with a letter from a monk at the Buddhist School of Dialectics in Dharamsala, who finds Karmay's article "unacceptable" for its allegations against Buddhism, and especially against the [Fifth] Dalai Lama for his sectarianism and "self-interested motivation." "By talking in this slanderous and unfounded manner, Mr. Karmay is himself becoming a danger to us Tibetans, threatening to cause cracks in Tibetan unity and the hitherto sound faith of the people in their Divine Leaders." *Tibetan Review* 12.7 (July 1977), p. 34. The response of the Buddhist monk would lend support to Stoddard's argument above (n. 9) that any criticism of traditional Tibetan society remains a "taboo" topic in exile; yet the fact that Karmay's article and Dhondup's own critical views are expressed in the public forum of the *Tibetan Review* demonstrates how exaggerated her claim is.

[19] Samten Karmay, "L'Apparition du petit homme tête-noire (Création et procréation des Tibétains selon un mythe indigene)," *Journal Asiatique*, 274.1-2 (1986), pp. 79-138; "The Etiological Problem of the Yarlung Dynasty," *Tibetan Studies*, ed. by Helga Uebach and Jampa Lobsang Panglung (Münich: 1988), pp. 219-222; "The Origin Myths of the First King of Tibet as Revealed in the *Can-lnga*," in *Tibetan Studies: Proceedings of the Sixth Seminar of the International Association for Tibetan Studies*, Vol. I, ed. by Per Kvaerne (Oslo: The Institute for Comparative Research in Human Culture, 1994), pp. 409-429; "Mountain Cult and National Identity in Tibet," in *Resistance and Reform in Tibet*, pp. 112-120; "The Cult of Mountain Deities and its Political Significance," in *Reflections of the Mountain*, ed. by Anne-Marie Blondeau and Ernest Steinkellner (Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1996), pp. 59-75.

[20] Samten Karmay, "L'âme et le Turquoise: Un Rituel Tibétain," *L'Ethnographie* 83 (1987), pp. 97-130; "L'homme et le boeuf: un rituel tibétain," *L'Ethnographie* n.s. 100-101 (1987), pp. 97-130; "The Local Deities and the Juniper Tree: a Ritual for Purification," *Journal Asiatique* Vol. 203 (1995), pp. 162-207.

[21] "Un témiognage sur le Bon face au Buddhisme á l'époque des rois tibétains," in *Contributions on Tibetan and Buddhist Religion and Philosophy*. Also, see Chapter II, note 70.

[22] Samten Karmay, "Mountain Cults and National Identity in Tibet," p. 114-115. Karmay emphasizes repeatedly in this article that the nationalist sentiments expressed in popular religious practices today, such as the worship of sacred mountains, are rooted in ancient "secular traditions," namely Tibetan epic literature (e.g. the Gesar epic) and the folk religion, which he calls the "unwritten tradition of the laity" (thus echoing Stein's "nameless tradition"). Karmay wants to avoid labeling such practices "religious" to avoid its association with either Buddhism or Bon; but calling the Tibetan's worship of sacred mountains "secular" is confusing. Karmay remains committed to a distinction between the transcendent and otherworldly orientation of elite religions (Buddhism and Bon) and the mundane, worldly orientation of folk practices. By valorizing the latter over the former, Karmay seems poised to introduce a form of national folklore studies for Tibetans, a discipline that is often invented by nationalists and nativist intellectuals.

[23] Samten Karmay, "The Origin Myths of the First King of Tibet as Revealed in the *Can-lnga*," in *Tibetan Studies: Proceedings of the 6th Seminar of the International Association for Tibetan Studies*, vol. I, ed. by Per Kvaerne (Oslo: The Institute for Comparative Research in Human Culture, 1994), pp. 409-429.

[24] Samten Karmay, "The Origin Myths of the First King of Tibet," p. 412: "This system of beliefs, in my view, has all the characteristic ingredients of a coherent religion: divinities and their cosmo-theogonic mythology associated with the sacred and divine character of the first king, rituals performed by priests, called *bon-po* or *lha-bon* also mythologically associated with the first king and who intervenes to deal with divinities and demons for various purposes. It is to this system of beliefs and its practitioners that a certain number of Dunhuang documents including PT 1038 refer as Bon and its practitioners as *bon-po*."

[25] Samten Karmay, "The Origin Myths of the First King of Tibet," p. 411.

[26] Namkhai Norbu, *The Necklace of Gzi: A Cultural History of Tibet* (Dharamsala: Information Office of His Holiness the Dalai Lama, 1981). This text is based upon a lecture given by Norbu to the Tibetan Youth Association in Switzerland in 1976. Samten Karmay's comments appear in the "Introduction:" "It must be pointed out that Rev. Norbu is the first Tibetan Buddhist who questions the value of his own Buddhist historical tradition. Armed with Bon historical records Rev. Norbu delves deeply in quest of the origins of Tibetan culture.... Unlike China in the past and Japan today where the indigenous culture and religion hold a position superior to the imported one, in Tibet Buddhist historians and writers took little interest in what could be described as Tibet's own culture."

[27] Namkhai Norbu, *The Necklace of Gzi*, p. 3: "To say that during the life time of Lord Buddha, when neighboring countries like China and India had attained high-level cultural accomplishments, Tibet was an empty region, devoid of life and waiting for the monkey-god and the rock-ogress to issue the first progenitor of the Tibetan people is ridiculous."

[28] Namkhai Norbu, *The Necklace of Gzi*, p. 4: "As the Tibetan scholars are extremely devoted to Dharma there are many cases where we have neglected out own country and race and belittled ourselves and relied upon and referred to India for many things. For example, if a scripture was written by a Tibetan scholar it was called *Bod-ma* (Tibetan manuscript) and used to be automatically looked down upon and neglected."

[29] Namkhai Norbu, *The Necklace of Gzi*, p. 24.

[30] Namkhai Norbu, *The Necklace of Gzi*, p. 24-5.

[31] Namkhai Norbu, *Drung, Deu and Bön: Narrations, Symbolic Languages, and the Bon Tradition in Ancient Tibet*, trans. by Adriano Clemente (Dharamsala: Library of Tibetan Works and Archives, 1995), pp. 24, 68-9.

[32] Namkhai Norbu, *Drung, Deu and Bön*, pp. 151.

[33] Namkhai Norbu, *Drung, Deu and Bön*, pp. 156-158.

[34] Namkhai Norbu, *Drung, Deu and Bön*; Namkhai Norbu, *Dzogchen: The Self-Perfected State*, trans. by Adriano Clemente (London 1989); Namkhai Norbu, *Un'introduzione allo Dzog-chen: Riposte a sedici domande* ed. and trans. by Adriano Clemente (Arcidosso, 1988); *Lo specchio: Un consiglio sulla presenza della consapevolezza*, ed. and trans. by Adriano Clemente (Arcidosso, 1989).

[35] *Drung, Deu and Bön*, p. xiii-xiv.

[36] Clemente writes that the significance of understanding Bon rituals that restore cosmic and individual harmony is the following: "Understanding in our time the value and significance of these rites means opening a door onto the immense panorama of the primordial experiences and knowledge of man because, as the great scholar Mircea Eliade suggested at the conclusion of his study of Australian religions, "The ultimate goal of the historian of religions is not to point out that there exist a certain number of types or patterns of religious behaviour, with their specific symbologies and theologies, but rather to *understand their meanings*." *Drung, Deu and Bön*, p. xiii.

[37] Erik Haarh, *The Yarlung Dynasty: A study with particular regard to the contribution by myths and legends to the history of Ancient Tibet and the origin and nature of its kings* (Copenhagen, 1969), p. 12.

[38] Haarh, *The Yarlung Dynasty*, p. 294.

[39] Macdonald, Ariane. "Une lecture des Pelliot tibétain 1286, 1287, 1038, 1047 et 1290. Essai sur le formation et l'emploi des mythes politiques dans la religion royale de Srong-bcan sgam-po," in *Etudes tibétaines dédiée a la mémoire de Marcelle Lalou*, ed. by Ariane Macdonald (Paris: A. Maisonneuve, 1971), pp. 190-391.

[40] Anne-Marie Blondeau, "Identification de la tradition appelée *bsGrags-pa bon-lugs*," *Acta Orientalia Hungaricae* 43.2-3 (1989), pp. 185-204; also "Les religions du Tibet," *Histoire des religions* vol. III, ed. by H. Ch. Puech (Paris: 1976), pp. 233-329.

[41] Rolf A. Stein, "Tibetica Antiqua III: A propos du mot *gcug-lag* et de la religion indigéne," *Bulletin de l'Ecole française d'Extréme Orient* 74 (1985), pp. 83-133; "Tibetica Antiqua IV: La tradition relative au début du bouddhisme au Tibet," *Bulletin de l'Ecole française d'Extréme Orient* 75 (1986), pp. 169-196; "Tibetica Antiqua V: La religione indigéne et les *bon-po* dans les manuscrits de Touen-houang," *Bulletin de l'Ecole française d'Extréme Orient* 76 (1988), pp. 27-56.

[42] For more on salvage or redemptive ethnography, see James Clifford, "On Ethnographic Allegory" in *Writing Culture*, p. 12.

CHAPTER IV

CONCLUSION: REFLEXIVITY AND THE COMPARATIVIST'S LOCATION

The heuristic method of criss-crossing that has been used in this dissertation involves roving between indigenous Tibetan and western representations of Buddhism/Bon. It requires a certain degree of detachment from either the Tibetan religious polemicists or earlier western Orientalists. Does this mean that the interpreter is situated in a utopian space of objectivity, neutrally positioned above and beyond his subject's polemics? Is he a passive spectator with unobstructed vision of the Tibetan drama of duels and duets? Or is he a transparent specter in the reflecting mirrors of his subjects? While the metaphors of criss-crossing, dramas and mirrors that have been used may suggest such a dislocated, disengaged perspective, these are not positions that I wish to assume or presume. Where then do I stand? To answer this question is no easy task, for it first requires performing an act of defamiliarization, through which one's own existence becomes strange. Only then can one try to articulate one's taken-for-granted attachments and one's complex relations to particular contexts of meaning. Recognizing that even this reflexive act of self-disclosure can be staged or exhibitionist, and that the gesture towards identifying my position will necessarily be inadequate, I shall attempt nonetheless to locate my position within an intellectual and disciplinary context, and suggest some implications for this research.[1]

To invoke the Tibetan distinction between insider/outsider, I am a marginal "outsider," neither Tibetan, nor Buddhist/Bonpo. My method is also unabashedly

secular. I am skeptical of appeals by insiders to sovereign religious authority, and their claims to closure or canonicity. Likewise, I am suspicious of Buddhist or Bon totalizing narratives. I do not accept either the boundary of Buddhist/Bon canons or of their religious communities as constituting the domain within which my interpretive perspective must operate. Indeed, it is precisely these symbolic boundaries that interest me, not as static, enduring, or self-evident, but as fluid, shifting and historically emergent signs of difference. Being an outsider is advantageous for gaining such a critical perspective. However, it does not grant me any transcendental privilege above the contesting voices that I record and represent.

One moral corollary of being an outsider is that one does not deign to speak on the Buddhists' and Bonpos' behalf. Rather that speaking for them, the point is to understand how Buddhists and Bonpos *make* their collective religious worlds. The emphasis placed on construction, creation and invention differs from the insiders' acceptance of the "given" or *sui generis* nature of the truths within their tradition. What emerges from being outside the mirrorwork of Tibetan historians is a more complex picture of Tibetan religious culture at work, especially in the tense polemical relations between Buddhists and Bonpos. But as much as one might wish to acknowledge the partial and refracted nature of one's own representation, in practice the control one has over presenting these mimicking voices in harmony may actually elide half of the story of their historical encounter, namely one's own position as intermediary. As Paul Rabinow points out with much insight, this is a predicament that writers face who aspire towards a post-modern form of cultural representation: "The kind of beings we want to become are

open, permeable ones, suspicious of meta-narratives: pluralizers. But authorial control seems to blunt self-reflection and the dialogic impulse."[2]

In theory, my investigation of Buddhist and Bon identities has underscored their dialogical, contingent character, in contrast to the monolithic and pure images used by the apologists to represent their own enduring tradition. The emphasis placed on plurality and partiality may seem at odds with the recurring generalizations about how "Bonpos" have responded to their "Buddhist" opponents, and vice-versa, as if these two terms had a stable referent, and were actually distinct entities. Of course language plays an unavoidable role in reifying these constructs into distinct things, but I too have simplified the diverse textual voices in order to create a narrative. Just as both Buddhists and Bonpos sought to structure their own tradition's multiplicity, so have I sought to reduce ambiguity and impose order on their conflicting and yet intertwining texts, using the image of mirroring and the strategy of the self-other dialectic. To acknowledge this means that I have been involved in "inventing" Buddhism and Bon vis-à-vis each other. Rather than passively watching their dramatic duels and duets as an objective spectator, I have played an instrumental role in their encounters and setting the stage for them, as it were. I consciously selected polemical texts and passages with ideological content, texts that seem to address the self/other dialectic.

Edward Said has identified three related tasks for the literary critic: the interpreter must connect knowing *how* to read (i.e. method) with knowing *what* to read, and then knowing what to do with that reading.[3] In my selection of polemical religious texts and historical narratives, I am motivated by a number of factors. First, my research is meant to reveal how Tibetan history is a contested domain, that Tibetan "religion" is often a

matter of argument, involving confrontations over the legitimacy of lineage and the authority of those presented as the embodiment of tradition. My decision to focus on Buddhist/Bon polemical conflicts is motivated by an agenda quite different from the liberal ecumenical model of religious comparison and dialogue, a model that has dominated the discipline of religious studies. Indeed, the approach adopted here to Tibetan religious historiography contains an implicit polemic directed at modern scholars of religion, even the so-called "Historians of Religion" (e.g. Eliade), who assume that religion's essential nature is *sui generis*, unique, and transhistorical.[4] Whereas scholars who believe that "religion" is an irreducible *sui generis* category tend to downplay differences, history, and sociopolitical context in favor of an abstract sameness to religions, my interest in Tibetan religious contestation and identity formation requires me to understand Tibetan religions in relation, and pay attention to the confrontation of signs and practices along the fault lines of power. Yet not all polemic is motivated by the raw urge to power, and it has creative powers of its own.[5]

In addition to the rather perverse pleasure I gain from reading this literature with detached irony and providing an outsider's iconoclastic perspective, I am also drawn to the polemical literature because its agonistic struggles imply that something important is at stake, other than the religious truth claims made. They contain important ideological content expressed in a rhetorical form. Buddhist and Bon historiography may be viewed as literary artifacts, and I have investigated how *bon/chos 'byung* operate as a narrative genre that is bent on establishing religious authority. Any reading of Buddhist and Bon texts that articulates both their mutual indebtedness (their shared categories, their common methods of re-presenting the past, and their similar strategies of incorporation)

and their uniqueness, actually highlights their hybrid nature, both partial and plural. Moreover, the historian of Tibetan religions who examines Buddhism/Bon must remain sensitive to the ways in which Tibetans negotiate and redefine the boundaries of their ideas and practices. The fluidity and political contingency of such boundaries as *Chos/Bon* become part of the very subject-matter of Tibetan religious history, rather than impediments to its study. When one examines what literary devices have constituted various shifting identities, one embarks on new terrain, no longer mapped exclusively by simple insider/outsider oppositions or other essentializing dichotomies used by Tibetan and western scholars. What is novel about such an approach is that it proliferates the histories and voices that have been suppressed and ignored by earlier generalizations about Tibetan Buddhist "Lamaists" and Bon "shamans."

The focus on the historical processes of religious synthesis, appropriation, and polemical interaction in Tibet requires one to pay attention to the workings of power and agency. Once one recognizes the ideological nature of this literature, one may try to reconstruct the historical context, the network of social-political determinations and engagements that shaped the antagonism between Buddhists and Bonpos. The project of historicizing the formation of Tibetan religious identity lies beyond the scope of this thesis, but it is a desideratum that follows from this research. As Said puts it, "each age and society recreates its 'others.' Far from a static thing then, identity of self or of 'other' is a much worked-over historical, social, intellectual and political process that takes place as a contest involving individuals and institutions in all societies."[6] The value of historicizing the formation of Tibetan religious and cultural identity lies in the recognition that any claim to embody the essential core of Tibetan identity ("insider-

ness") is contingent and dependent upon the perceived threat of "outsiders." Put another way, while Buddhists might argue that their Tibetan identity is Buddha-given (from Avaloktiteśvara himself, manifest through Srong btsan sgam po and others), the "core" of their Tibetan-ness is not an enduring essence, although part of its appeal is that it seems so. Rather, their Buddhist identity arises from the historical conditions that formed that image, including the apparent threat posed by outsiders such as the Bonpos. The contemporary political impact of gaining such a historical perspective lies in diffusing whatever coercive claims are made by the reigning Buddhist purists, who would exclude their religious rivals as non-Tibetan and claim that their tradition alone is coextensive with Tibetan culture.

One's imagination of the past is always constrained and informed by contemporary issues. The decision to focus primarily on Tibetan historical narratives with "missionary" and "nationalist" themes, written during the twelfth to fourteenth centuries, was informed by the contemporary plight of Tibetan nationalists trying to resist Chinese colonialism. These modern nationalists often look back nostalgically to the Tibetan imperial period, when China feared Tibet's powerful armies and its dominant political presence in Central Asia. The historical narratives with "nativist" and "nationalist" themes written during the past are now being re-read as relevant to the contemporary situation. They seem to speak to the urgent needs of the present.

A few important methodological morals may be concluded from these stories. Historians must reflect upon the effects of history on their own representations of the past, as well as the political and moral consequences of their representations. Although the historian labors so earnestly at situating a text in a context, for the believer the text's

truth claims are transhistorical. As Bernard Faure has noted: "A text explained (or understood) in purely historical terms is deprived of its truth claim. By merely placing the text in a network of determinations (author, influences, context) one tends to forget that the written text transcends its conditions of production and becomes contemporary with all its readers, by addressing them dialogically."[7] Faure's point is well taken, and it reminds us that any text is open to multiple interpretations, both utopian and ideological. Any utopian reading of Buddhist and Bon narratives is based upon the relative autonomy of the text. I say "relative autonomy" advisedly, since even the contemporary utopian reading of Bon texts about Tibet's golden age of independence may be viewed as a contemporary resurgence of nativist ideals espoused in earlier centuries.

If the project of demonstrating the constructed (and mutually indebted) nature of Buddhist and Bonpo identities appears incompatible with the nationalist quest for Tibetan essences, what are its political implications? More simply, what is constructive about such knowledge? A sense of the flexibility of the past, and the resilience of Tibetan identity may offer some hope for creating a future Tibet out of the concreta of the past. The heuristic method advanced here is sympathetic to a form of historical constructivism that is forward-looking, making selective use of patches of tradition in order to enrich the present and the future. It is opposed to the extreme traditionalism that wishes to return to idealized moments frozen in the past. What conservative Tibetan writers overlook is that their tradition is in fact malleable, and in part because of its malleability, it is far from dead. For example, the Buddhist themes of impermanence, interdependence, and emptiness could all be creatively adapted and re-invented to interpret the past, in order to reveal the plurality and partiality of religious identities.

Re-thinking the relationship between Buddhism and Bon has implications for the Buddhist studies field. This dissertation project arose from a felt need to trespass upon the circumscribed disciplinary boundaries of Buddhist studies. Many Buddhologists have had their imaginations disciplined so that they naturally assume the coherence of their subject (Buddhism) while "syncretic" traditions such as Bon (or Taoism, or Shinto) are designated as derivative. This work has sought to re-imagine Buddhism and Bon as a cultural construct, theirs and ours in the field of Buddhist studies. We need not conclude that Bon is a form of Buddhism, however unorthodox, which is the received view these days among western scholars of Bon. The incorporation of Bon into Buddhism (and Buddhist Studies) replicates the Buddhists' strategy of control and condescension; but it also disregards the innovation and the tremendous amount of energy Bonpos have invested in maintaining a distinct identity. Yet what is really lost by incorporating Bon into Buddhism is the menacing threat Bon poses to the discipline—not as an authentic presence, but for its hybrid character, mirroring (yet not simply replicating) the hybrid nature of Buddhism. If we take seriously a vision of Buddhism and Bon as mutually constitutive, then the object of the field needs to be defined differentially, and redefined, and refined— never found or solidly founded. The goal of a critical and reflexive historiography of Buddhism/Bon is not narrative closure, but an elusive and partial understanding, perhaps akin to what is revealed in the mirrors of the Tibetan diviner.

Notes to Chapter IV

[1] Gayatri Spivak serves as an exemplary theorist for this project of self-disclosure, for she is fully aware of the complex nature of her own positionality (as a Third-World feminist-Marxist-Deconstructionist) and the difficulty of foregrounding such a position throughout her work, yet she manages to do so with some success. See her essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?" in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, ed. by C. Nelson and L. Grossberg (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988), pp. 271 ff.

[2] Paul Rabinow, "Representations are Social Facts: Modernity and Post-modernity in Anthropology," in *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography* (Berkeley: University of California Press), p. 257.

[3] Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1993), p. 259. Said employs a heuristic strategy that he calls "contrapuntal," which involves reading the literature of the colonizer and the colonized by alternating continually between the metropolitan center and the peripheries, "according neither the privilege of "objectivity" to "our side" nor the encumbrance of "subjectivity" to "theirs". The question is a matter of knowing *how* to read, as the deconstructors say, and not detaching this from the issue of knowing *what* to read." Said's "contrapuntal method" has informed the criss-crossing technique pursued here between both Buddhist and Bonpo writers, as well as between Tibetan and western writers.

[4] For an excellent analysis and critique of the *sui generis* model of religion and its impact on the discipline of religious studies, see Russell T. McCutcheon, *Manufacturing Religion: The Discourse on Sui Generis Religion and the Politics of Nostalgia* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997); also Timothy Fitzgerald, *The Ideology of Religious Studies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999); and Ivan Strenski, *Religion in Relation: Method, Application, and Moral Location* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1993).

[5] For a nuanced treatment of Tibetan polemical literature, see Daniel Preston Martin, *The Emergence of Bon and the Tibetan Polemical Tradition*, unpublished Ph.D dissertation (Bloomington: University of Indiana, 1991). Also see Donald S. Lopez, Jr., "Polemical Literature (*dGag lan*)," in *Tibetan Literature: Studies in Genre*, ed. by José Ignacio Cabezón snf Roger R. Jackson (Ithaca: Snow Lion Publications, 1996), pp. 217-228.

[6] Edward Said, "East isn't East: The Impending End of the Age of Orientalism", in *Times Literary Supplement* (February 3, 1995), p. 3.

[7] Bernard Faure, *Chan Insights and Oversights* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), p. 136.

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